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General Assembly

Sixty-seventh session

Official Records

19th plenary meeting
Monday, 1 October 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kamau (Kenya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John Baird, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Baird (Canada) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour to address the opening of the sixty-seventh regular session of the General Assembly.

First of all, allow me to begin with a moment of silence in tribute to all the diplomats, from so many countries, who have lost their lives in the service of our common humanity and in the pursuit of deeper understanding among countries.

(*spoke in English*)

With the opening of this session, the General Assembly has passed an important milestone. Since the first session was convened in Central Hall Westminster in London in January 1946 until the calling to order of this new session, precisely 66 years and eight months have elapsed. The General Assembly is now two thirds of a century old — two thirds of a century during which the Assembly and the planet have been witness to both great achievements and grave injustices and have seen both human triumphs and human tragedies.

It has been two thirds of a century during which the peoples of the world made powerful progress. We have launched humans into orbit. We have mapped the human genome and unlocked various mysteries of life and science. We have pulled hundreds of millions of people out of abject poverty. And yet it has also been two thirds of a century during which we suffered deep disappointment — the worst incidents of terrorism in the world's history, including the largest terror attack ever, here in New York on 11 September 2001; the failure to anticipate and prevent genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda; and the stubborn persistence of totalitarianism and despotism. Some developments were predictable. Others no one foresaw, and nobody could have scripted.

As we stand on the threshold of the next third of a century, we are reminded of that old adage, "the only constant is change".

(*spoke in French*)

The only constant is change. Indeed, our world continues to change and at a rapid pace in all domains. At the geopolitical level, change means a rebalancing of power and new opportunities. Not since the Cold War has so much change occurred so quickly. In these turbulent times, when change can be swift and unexpected, it is all the more important that we focus with precision on the constants that remain true.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada is a maritime nation bordered by three oceans. Please allow me, then, to use a nautical

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analogy. At one time, sailors would navigate by the North Star. Winds and currents would shift, storms would blow, ships might even veer off course, but the North Star remained fixed — as a guide and as a goal. In the same way, the only way for us to navigate the seas of change is to follow fixed principles and chart a course for immutable goals. In our opinion, those goals are the well-being, prosperity, security and dignity of humankind, objectives that are reflected in the purposes inscribed in Article 1 of the United Nations Charter. We owe it to those we serve — to the people of this planet — to maintain consistent effort in that direction.

They will judge our success by how well we further the ends of prosperity, security, and human dignity. One measures results by measuring the results themselves, not by weighing best efforts, not by counting good intentions, and not by calculating inputs. I do not propose, therefore, to dwell extensively on reform of the United Nations. This Organization is not a goal; it is merely the means to accomplish goals. However, the United Nations must spend less time looking at itself, and more time focused on the problems that demand its attention. I make that observation in a constructive and positive spirit.

Canada was an original signatory to the Charter, and is today the seventh-largest contributor to the budget of this important Organization. Our commitment to the United Nations has been tested and is proven. Our commitment to the United Nations is important. Nevertheless, because of our commitment to this body, we cannot and will not participate in endless, fruitless inward-looking exercises.

Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations will henceforth devote primary attention to what the United Nations is achieving, not to how the United Nations arranges its affairs. The United Nations spends too much time on itself. It must now look outward. The preoccupation with procedure and process must yield to substance and results. If the United Nations focuses on the achievement of goals — such as prosperity, security and human dignity — then reform will take care of itself. As the international community sets its sights on a post-2015 development framework, it should not forget the work that remains to be done and the commitments it has made.

The United Nations Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, co-chaired by Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and President Jakaya Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania, is the type of initiative that Canada would like to see more of in the future, and its recommendations need to be integrated into a post-2015 framework.

The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations reflects our collective determination to achieve "better standards of life" for all humankind. It sets as a goal "the economic and social advancement of all peoples". That is no mean ambition. Those of us who recognize a Creator accept the responsibility to use the Creator's gifts to improve the well-being of all. Openness and engagement are vital to progress and prosperity. Since before recorded history, societies have reached out to their neighbours and beyond. As soon as human beings invented transport, we invented trade, exchanging not just the fruits of the Earth, but also goods, practices and ideas. Informed by our successes and failures — that is, having benefited from engagement and having paid the price of isolation — humankind has learned several lessons. We cannot develop understanding by building walls between cultures. We cannot achieve prosperity by erecting walls between economies. And we cannot advance a people by putting walls between them and the State.

It is no longer necessary for humankind to endlessly debate how to make people better off. There is no special alchemy required. Blessed with the benefit of human experience, we know what produces prosperity: free trade among open societies operating under transparent, consistent and fair rules. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently wrote, "engaging in the world is the best path to a better future".

The fight for the economic and social advancement of all peoples is manifested in the struggle for open markets, open society and open-mindedness. It is a struggle in which Canada is decidedly not neutral. We recognize that the well-being of Canadians depends both on openness at home and on openness to the world. Canadians know, from experience, the connection between trade and prosperity. After all, in order to support the world's tenth-largest economy with only the world's thirty-sixth-largest population, we must be a trading nation. We are expanding trade at a rate of unparalleled ambition, and consequently we are looking for partners. But we fully recognize that sustained trade requires stability and security.

The United Nations will also be judged by how well it advances the security of humankind. The goal of security is not separate from the objective of well-being.

Security is, after all, a vital part of people's well-being. Once again, openness and engagement are important means of achieving that goal. While there may at times be tension in the means of execution, there exists no fundamental conflict between national security and the open society; both seek to protect the same values, the same rights and the same freedoms.

It is not enough for a society to protect its own security. Global security affects all of us as members of the global community. Or, as Nelson Mandela eloquently put it, "freedom would be meaningless without security in the home and in the streets". Thus, our freedom is strengthened when others are free, and our liberty is diminished so long as any of our brothers or sisters are imprisoned by fear. Because a threat to one is a threat to all, our security is enhanced when we cooperate to protect fragile democracies or to block the forces of instability.

The crisis in Syria is a test of this Organization's ability to achieve results. While the brutal and repressive regime of Bashar Al-Assad continues the slaughter of its own people, the United Nations continues to fail to impose binding sanctions that would stem the crimson tide of that bloody assault. Until the last moment of recorded time, the world will remember and history will judge Member States that are allowing the atrocities to continue.

Many people of the planet, including many of the citizens whom we represent, cannot understand why this Organization — despite the sound and fury of debate in this great Assembly — has been unable to take concrete steps. Some ask, "What business is it of ours?" Our citizens would argue that the business is our common humanity, and our mandate is the strengthening of humanity's bonds. It is difficult to fault their logic. The late Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it". And if the collective interest in our shared humanity does not motivate us to act, then the self-interest of our own security should. After all, a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons does not respect national sovereignty or recognize territorial integrity. Who among us would be secure if the chemical and biological weapons of another Member State fell into the wrong hands? That is why Canada calls on the Syrian regime to ensure that its stockpile of chemical weapons remains secure against possible use or proliferation by those who would do evil.

When the post-Al-Qadhafi Libya declared its willingness to destroy previously unknown stockpiles, Canada stepped in and provided $6 million to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in order to achieve that vital objective. Until such an opportunity arises in Syria, Canada stands ready to assist neighbouring States in taking measures to reduce the threat of the proliferation of those terrible weapons. Until that time, Canada continues to call for an immediate end to the violence. Al-Assad must be replaced by a new order that protects Syria's territorial integrity and all the rights of each and every citizen.

I have seen the despair of the Syrian people first hand on the Jordanian border, where a little girl heart-wrenchingly told me that all she wanted to do was to go home. That experience will no doubt leave a lasting scar on the children caught in the middle of the tragedy. We must ensure that they have the opportunity for a better life — for a life free of fear and full of opportunity. I pledge that Canada will work to address the urgent humanitarian crises wrought by the violence of the past 18 months. It behoves all Member States in a position to do so to improve conditions for the Syrian civilians affected by their great struggle against tyranny in pursuit of dignity.

Today, the most significant threat to global peace and security remains the regime in Iran. It refuses to comply with Security Council resolutions. It routinely threatens the very existence of the State of Israel. It foments hatred against the Jewish people and incites genocide. It provides aid, comfort and support to terrorist groups. It is guilty of the widespread and massive repression of the human rights of its own people, including gays, lesbians and religious minorities.

A nuclear Iran would embolden an already reckless regime and would perpetuate a very destabilizing factor not just for an already fragile region, but also for the entire planet. The Government of Canada has not only formally listed the Iranian regime as a State sponsor of terrorism under Canadian law, but we have also suspended diplomatic relations. Some may ask why a country committed to openness and engagement would suspend relations. We do not take such decisions lightly.

On a practical level, the regime's blatant disregard for the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations

created real and legitimate concern for the safety and security of our civilian diplomats. But there is also a great principle at stake. While Canada prizes engagement and open relations, there can be no open engagement with a regime that dishonours its word, repudiates its commitments and threatens to perpetuate crimes against humanity. Canada's philosophy is captured in the wisdom of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second United Nations Secretary-General, killed 51 years ago while fighting for peace and justice. He advised: "Never, for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience or convictions". That is why Canada has imposed some of the toughest economic sanctions against the Iranian regime.

However, let me be absolutely clear. Our quarrel is not with the people of Iran, but with the regime, which aims to silence their voices. Canada urges Iran to comply with its international nuclear obligations and to cease sensitive enrichment activities. We support the process of the five plus one group of countries. Iran needs to seize the opportunity provided by the international community and negotiate in good faith by showing demonstrable progress and by meeting its nuclear obligations.

The Iranian regime still has the chance to redeem itself. In fact, I encourage Iran to follow the example of some of its neighbours, some of whom Canada has supported in building nuclear energy programmes for peaceful purposes. We will continue to work closely with the United States, the European Union and other allies to put pressure on Iran to comply with its important international nuclear obligations. Rather than accept as inevitable the conflict that Iran seems intent on provoking, Canada seeks a peaceful alternative. Iran must act immediately to stop all enrichment and must abandon technology that could be used for weapons. Iran is testing the will of the international community to its utmost. That, too, must end.

The world's security is closely linked to the third goal that should animate this Organization, namely, protecting the dignity and worth of every person by upholding and protecting fundamental freedoms. The great poet Kahlil Gibran inspired us to remember that safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful goal of a human being.

That principle is not simply a question of beliefs and values. It includes a requirement for action. Protecting human rights and human dignity is an obligation that each State owes its citizens. It is a mutual obligation that all members of the international community must share. History teaches us that an open society that is tolerant, pluralistic and free is the best guarantor of human rights and dignity.

A threat to the security of humankind is often coupled with the crushing of human rights. Yet human rights abuses that do not threaten security still concern us. The enslavement of others is a vicious human rights abuse. It takes many forms, such as the notorious political prisoner camps of North Korea, the forcible recruitment by the Mouvement du 23 mars group in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the early and forced marriage of young girls, which is a truly barbaric form of slavery. Another despicable type of enslavement is the criminalization of sexuality: jailing, torturing and killing people for who they are and whom they love. Other abuses enslave the soul by suppressing, sometimes with brutal force, the right to worship freely, to practise a faith and to hold religious beliefs. Assaults on human dignity, wherever they occur, are unacceptable.

At the start of my address, I observed that results matter. This Organization was created to achieve certain goals, and it will be measured by its success in doing so. No one ever said that it would be easy to make real progress in advancing the prosperity, well-being, security and dignity of humankind. It is not easy but it is essential. Despite the challenges, the frequent setbacks and the cost, which is often heavy, we know that the nations and peoples of the world are up to the challenge. As we celebrate Mohandas Gandhi's birthday tomorrow, let us be inspired by his words: "You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty."

Emboldened and bolstered by our faith in humanity, let us move forward together to secure the results that this Organization was established to achieve.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Edward Nalbandyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Nalbandyan (Armenia) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I would also like to extend our thanks to the outgoing President, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser.

This session of the General Assembly is an invaluable opportunity to bring together Member States in order to examine the challenges facing humanity and to join efforts in effectively addressing those challenges and in achieving internationally agreed goals. We all know that when decisions are based on common understanding and agreement, their implementation and success are more likely.

Armenia continues to be committed to strengthening the institutional capacities of the Organization. We support the United Nations reform processes and are ready to contribute to them. We believe that the reforms are an opportunity to strengthen the role of the United Nations in solving the major issues facing our world and to achieve both the Millennium Development Goals and the sustainable development goals.

We welcome the fact that the agenda of the sixty-seventh session, which encompasses the most pressing issues of our joint responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, proposes that the session focus on the settlement of disputes by peaceful means. In that context, we view the goals of disarmament and arms control as major elements of global and regional security systems. We must also shoulder the responsibility to work together to counter militaristic threats.

A few days ago, on 14 September, within the framework of the United Nations, the first ever High-Level Forum on the Culture of Peace took place, calling for tolerance and seeking to build mutual understanding and respect. Unfortunately, today, hate and intolerance continue to spread in some parts of the world, and we have yet to dig into the root causes of such situations, to have the courage to openly ask difficult questions as to the reasons for them, and to face sometimes painful responses.

(*spoke in English*)

Regrettably, we have witnessed intolerance and hatred in our part of the world, too. Year after year, Armenia has, from this rostrum, raised concerns about the militaristic rhetoric, blatant violation of international commitments and anti-Armenian hysteria being instilled into Azerbaijani society from the highest levels of its leadership. Many international organizations on human rights have been alerted to flagrant cases of xenophobia, racism, intolerance and violations of human rights in Azerbaijan, as well as about the policy of hatred against Armenians.

What has been the Azerbaijani response? It not only ignores the expectations of the international community, but it constantly takes new steps that go against the values of the civilized world. The latest such case is the Azeri Government's release and glorification of the murderer Mr. Ramil Safarov, who had slaughtered an Armenian officer in his sleep with an axe, during a NATO programme in Budapest, simply because he was Armenian. The Azerbaijani leadership made him a symbol of national pride and an example for young people to follow.

The world's reaction was unanimous and very clear in condemning what was done by Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, in granting him clemency. Azerbaijan continues to express bewilderment at the stance of the international community. What did they expect — that the international community would applaud the glorification of a heinous murderer? The Azerbaijani leadership continues to pretend that the act was in accordance not only with the Azerbaijani Constitution and legislation, but also with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant European conventions. The leadership of the country claims that what was done was very good. It is very sad indeed that the constitution and legislation of a country would permit making a hero of a murderer and paying such a brutal criminal a salary for the years he spent in prison.

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe warned that "to glorify and reward such a person flies in the face of all accepted standards for human rights protection and rule of law". The President of the European Parliament and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed concern about the abuse of the European legal instrument in question. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said on 7 September: "ethnically motivated hate crimes of this gravity should be deplored and properly punished — not publicly glorified by leaders and politicians".

It is very clear that there are different perceptions about international legal principles and laws, different perceptions in Azerbaijan and the rest of the world about what is good and what is bad. That is deeply irresponsible and shameful behaviour, not only for a non-permanent member of the Security Council, but also a Member State of the United Nations.

It is clear that the international community cannot tolerate the attempts of the Azerbaijani leadership to

adjust international law to their own racist ideology. With a rich domestic experience in corruption, Baku is attempting to transfer that vice to inter-State relations, exploiting it as a tool in order to impose its own false perceptions on others. The international community cannot tolerate the attempts of Azerbaijan to replace the rule of law with the rule of oil.

The scandalous situation regarding Safarov has seriously undermined the Nagorno Karabakh negotiation process and endangered the already fragile regional security and stability. Azerbaijan poses a threat to the security and stability in the region by constantly threatening to use force against Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia, along with the daily unprovoked warmongering by its leadership. It has not only rejected the proposals of the three co-Chair countries of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) group on the consolidation of the ceasefire agreement and on the creation of a mechanism of investigation of incidents along the line of contact but also systematically commits ceasefire violations, not only on the contact line between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan but also through provocations along the border with Armenia and ceaseless acts of vandalism against the Armenian historical and cultural heritage.

While Armenia and the international mediators have been working hard around the negotiation table, Azerbaijan has increased its military budget more than twenty-fold during the past few years, and boasts about it. While Armenia and the international community have been calling for the withdrawal of snipers from the line of contact, Azerbaijani leaders have been rejecting those calls and have opened sniper schools for young people. While Armenia has been calling for regional economic cooperation, which could become a tool for increasing confidence between the parties, Azerbaijani authorities have declared that, together with Turkey, they will continue the blockade until there are no more Armenians in Armenia.

Armenia and the international community are speaking in one language regarding the Nagorno Karabakh issue. The documents on the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict adopted within the framework of the OSCE Astana Summit in 2010; the OSCE Ministerial Conferences of Helsinki in 2008, Athens in 2009, Ahnaty in 2010 and Vilnius in 2011; the statements of Presidents of the Co-Chair countries within the framework of the Group of Eight Summits in l'Aquila in 2009, in Muskoka in 2010, and in Deauville in 2011; and during the Group of 20 Summit in 2012 in Los Cabos serve as proof of that. The position of Armenia is in line with those documents, and it is in line with the position of the international community, namely, to accept the settlement on that basis.

Despite the intensive efforts of the three Co-Chair countries of the OSCE, it has been impossible to reach a breakthrough, because the Azerbaijani side has rejected, one after another, all of the proposals presented by the mediators. Despite Azerbaijan's destructive stance, Armenia will continue to work towards the settlement of the Karabakh issue exclusively through peaceful means and on the basis of the purposes, principles and norms reflected in the Charter and international law.

Like many other speakers, I wish to express our concerns about the developments and worsening of the humanitarian situation in Syria, which also directly affects the large Armenian community in that country. That community was formed mainly by the survivors of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, they are struggling for life, as are many Syrian citizens. Armenia continues to receive refugees from Syria; those refugees are full of worries about the escalation of violence in that country. It is impossible to reach a durable settlement without the cessation of hostilities by all parties and without an inclusive political dialogue that takes into account the interests of all Syrians.

Next year, the United Nations will mark the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. That anniversary will become an important landmark and occasion on which to create a more effective instrument for combatting the crimes of genocide. The denial of genocide and impunity pave the way for the repetition of new crimes against humanity. As descendants of the nation that survived the horrors of the first genocide of the twentieth century, we are convinced that the international community must stand together — independent of any kind of considerations — in the recognition and strong condemnation of genocide, so as to be able to prevent it from occurring. In the absence of such unanimity, humankind will witness new attempts at crimes against humanity. Our strong conviction is that we should keep the issue high on our common agenda. We should recommit to a world where the crime of genocide can never occur again.

Armenia gladly assumes its share of our common responsibility to support the United Nations as a platform for dialogue, multilateralism and collective action in addressing the multiple challenges of today's world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman.

Mr. Abdulla (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to offer the President and his friendly country, the Republic of Serbia, my warmest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I would also like to express my appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, from the brotherly State of Qatar, for the exemplary way in which he conducted the work of the previous session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his role and efforts in improving the Organization's working mechanisms, and to wish him every success in his endeavours. The record of the United Nations includes numerous positive and tangible achievements that have helped to promote international peace and security and reach a political consensus on many regional and international issues.

In our Middle East region, the Syrian crisis continues to be of great concern, owing to the great loss of life and property that it has caused and the instability that it has produced in the region and the world as a whole. Despite the efforts of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the parties involved in the Syrian crisis have failed to reach a peaceful solution that could spare the lives of the Syrian people.

We call on our brothers in Syria to renounce violence, end hostilities and launch a political process that will fulfil the aspirations and hopes of the Syrian people and preserve Syria's security, stability and unity. At the same time, we call on the Security Council, the international body primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to reach consensus on a unified position on the Syrian crisis, without political disagreements and without bias towards any side, by way of starting a serious national dialogue between all political forces in Syria, with no exceptions. We believe that the principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led process of transition, as contained in the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex), issued at its meeting in Geneva in mid-2012, could form the basis for a solution, if agreed on and accepted by all Syrian and international parties.

The conflicting interests among some countries and their disagreements on how to address the Syrian conflict no longer serve any purpose, because the time has come to take collective action that can preserve security, stability and development for every country in the Middle East, especially since the alternative would be the spread of violence, killing, destruction and chaos. We believe that it is not in the world's best interests to allow the Middle East to become another global flashpoint.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say that my country welcomes the appointment of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria. We hope that he can provide practical and concrete proposals to pull Syria out of the current cycle of violence and killing.

We are aware of the complexities that arise in any discussion of the question of Palestine at sessions of the Assembly. We all know, however, that while the United Nations has explored every avenue and adopted many resolutions and policies on the Palestinian question, that issue continues to be a cause for concern and a source of unending threats and conflicts in the Middle East and beyond. We believe, therefore, that the role of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine should change from one of managing the crisis to one of seriously seeking a just, lasting and comprehensive political solution that would take into account the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis and lead to the establishment of a State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel. In that context, my country supports Palestine's application for non-member State observer status at the United Nations, hoping that that will usher a new phase in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and one that could make a positive contribution to settling the issue.

The Somali people have long suffered from an absence of security, stability and State institutions and bodies; we therefore welcome the formation of the new Somali Parliament and the election of Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as President of Somalia. We hope that his Government will be able to achieve national reconciliation and establish security and stability throughout Somalia.

As we call on the international community to provide support and assistance, whether political, economic or humanitarian, to the Somali people, we urge the Somali factions and parties from various political and tribal affiliations and organizations to reject violence, cease hostilities and place the higher interest of the nation above all others. We believe that a national dialogue, involving all parties in the Somali conflict, regardless of their ideological and political differences and inclinations, is essential and will help restore security, stability and nation-building in Somalia.

We would like to commend the international efforts to combat piracy and the armed robbery of merchant vessels in the Indian Ocean, particularly in the Arabian Sea. The Sultanate of Oman, which is located on the Arabian Sea, reaffirms its continuing support for international efforts to eradicate the problem, and will cooperate with countries that have a naval presence in the area in order to protect international trade and navigation.

From the outset, the Sultanate of Oman has supported the proposal to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. In that regard, we welcome the Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, scheduled to be held in Finland at the end of this year. We hope it will be able to officially declare the Middle East a zone free from nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction, similar to other such zones that have been established elsewhere in the world.

At a time when Muslims are trying to promote a culture of tolerance and coexistence, we note that there are those who abuse their right to express themselves by deliberately slandering monotheistic religions and prophets and messengers of God. My country condemns the video slandering the Prophet Muhammad — peace be upon him — which clearly and deliberately sought to spread a culture of hatred against Muslims. Despite the gravity of the offence, we reject escalating the reaction to a level resulting in attacks against diplomatic missions and representatives, such as those against United States and other Western diplomatic missions.

Against the backdrop of those events and similar incidents earlier, we believe that it is incumbent on the United Nations to adopt international legislation that would hold accountable those responsible for any deliberate abuse of and slander against the sanctity of people's beliefs, with a view to deterring others who may attempt to spread hatred among people.

The world today is facing a genuine threat of food shortages, owing to the steady increase in the world's population and the problems facing the global economy, which have resulted in the famines currently plaguing many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There is no doubt that addressing that problem will require us to undertake a practical study of alternatives that could alleviate the negative impacts of food shortages. Among the ideas we deem worthy of exploring is the establishment of a global food reserve system to deal with food shortages, with food reserve centres located in various continents of the world and managed through an international fund specifically established to support the system. States, international institutions and sovereign funds that have the capacity to contribute to the fund would also be allowed to do so. We are of the view that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in the light of its expertise in that field, could be the appropriate body to oversee the preparation and implementation of such a study.

We would like to take this opportunity to encourage industrialized countries to increase their investment in agricultural research and to utilize science and technology in their search for innovative solutions aimed at increasing food production so as to keep pace with the steady increase in the global demand for food.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my country's support for all international efforts to achieve the aspirations of peoples to a safer, more stable and prosperous world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Never before have Latin America and the Caribbean expressed themselves with such strength and unity as they did at the Summit of the Americas, held last April in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Once again, Cuba was excluded at the insistence of the United States. Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, which our country fervently supports, and the lifting of the blockade against Cuba were the focus of a declaration that demonstrated that the American homeland envisaged by Bolivar — our America as envisaged

by Marti — has entered a new era: the century of its ultimate independence.

Some months prior, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held its inaugural summit meeting in Caracas. No other institutional entity in our hemisphere in the course of the last century is of such major importance, wrote the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, about CELAC. We know that CELAC still has not yet reached its full development, so that our peoples can go forward in ranks as compact as the veins of silver in the roots of the Andes. But Latin America and the Caribbean have definitively changed, and they are prepared to make a greater contribution to the world order. However, the threats, dangers and obstacles should not be underestimated.

The policy of the United States with regard to our region, under both Democratic and Republican Administrations, has been essentially the same. The promises made by the current President in 2009 have gone unfulfilled. Tireless efforts have been made to control our wealth, to impose their models, culture and ideas, and to interfere in our internal affairs. Despite talk of "intelligent power" and the use of fabulous new technology, the focus remains on security and military deployment, rather than on democratic and mutually beneficial relations between equal, sovereign States.

In the circumstances of a global economic crisis, the depletion of resources and the shifting balances in the world, NATO continues to perceive our region as a mere periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area, in which it might intervene to protect its interests, however illegitimate.

The upcoming elections in the sister nation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will be decisive for the shared destiny of our region. We would like to express to the Venezuelan people and their leader, President Chávez Frías, our full solidarity in the face of the looming attempts at destabilization. The governing powers in the United States would be making a very serious mistake of untold consequences if they were to attempt to reverse by force the social achievements attained by our peoples.

Cuba has continuously contributed to peace in Colombia, with discretion and modesty. We fully supported the confidential exploratory talks held throughout this year in Havana, and we will continue to do so as a guarantor and host of the upcoming process of dialogue between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

Our America will remain mutilated as long as Puerto Rico, a Latin American and Caribbean nation, lacks its independence — a cause that we fully support.

Today's world is in no way similar to the one that was envisioned by those who drafted the United Nations Charter, over the ashes left by the Second World War, when they expressed their determination to save our generations from the scourge of war; protect the fundamental rights of human beings and equality among all nations, large and small; and promote justice, dignity and social progress. Today, the overthrow of Governments through the use of force and violence is being blatantly encouraged. Regime change is being imposed from Washington and other NATO capitals, and wars of conquest are being waged for the control of natural resources and areas of strategic importance.

The Governments of the United States and some European countries have decided to overthrow the Syrian Government. To that end, they have armed, financed and trained opposition groups, and turned to the use of mercenaries.

Owing mainly to the firm opposition of Russia and China, it has not been possible to manipulate the Security Council into imposing the interventionist formula that has been applied in the context of recent bellicose ventures.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Syrian people to the full exercise of its right to self-determination and sovereignty without interference or foreign intervention of any sort. The violence, massacres and terrorist acts, which have taken a high toll in innocent lives, must cease. The trafficking in arms and money flows that helps fund insurgent groups, as well as the shameful manipulation of reality by the media, must also come to an end.

It is the duty of the General Assembly to make use of the means at its disposal to promote a peaceful solution to the current situation, which is destroying that Arab country, and prevent foreign military aggression, which would have serious consequences for the entire Middle East region.

The General Assembly should act with resolve and recognize the Palestinian State as a full Member of the United Nations, within the borders established prior to 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital; and it

should do so now, with or without the consent of the Security Council; with or without a United States veto; and with or without new peace negotiations.

The global economic crisis, which is having a particularly strong impact on Europe, reflects the inability of Governments and institutions to solve a problem that requires a rethinking of the basic tenets of the current system of international economic relations, which serves only to pillage underdeveloped countries.

The harsh consequences of the crisis in the developed world and the failed policies adopted so far in an attempt to stop it continue to be borne by workers, the increasing number of unemployed, immigrants and the poor, whose protest movements are being brutally repressed. The predicted increase in food prices as a result of the drought that is affecting much of North America threatens to exacerbate global food insecurity.

Environmental destruction is also worsening. The loss of biodiversity and of the natural balance of ecosystems is accelerating; and the growing irrationality of production and consumption patterns, the marginalization of more than half of the world's population and the lack of comprehensive measures to halt climate change pose an ever-increasing risk to the physical integrity of entire nations, particularly small island States.

In the face of those colossal challenges, we wonder if anything could ever justify the fact that, 20 years after the end of the so-called Cold War, military budgets have almost doubled, reaching the astronomical figure of $1.74 trillion. As President Raúl Castro Ruz asked, against what enemies will those weapons be used? Will they be used to eliminate the masses of poor people who can no longer tolerate their poverty, or to halt the unstoppable migrations of survivors?

Under these circumstances, it is urgent to save the United Nations and subject it to deep-seated reform, so as to put it at the service of all, equally sovereign States and free it from the arbitrariness and double standards of a handful of industrialized and powerful countries.

International law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations should be resolutely enforced; the key role of the General Assembly should be restored; and a democratic, transparent and truly representative Security Council should be relaunched.

The Summit of Non-Aligned Countries was successfully held in Tehran and reaffirmed the Movement's positions in defence of peace, independence and the sovereign equality of States; justice; the right to development; sovereignty over natural resources; general and complete disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament; and the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. We have pledged our full support to the chairmanship of the Movement.

On July 31, the State Department of the United States included Cuba once again on its unilateral, arbitrary list of States that sponsor international terrorism. The true motive behind the inclusion of Cuba on that spurious list is to fabricate pretexts to increase the persecution of Cuba with respect to its financial transactions and justify the policy of blockade, which has caused immense human and economic harm totalling $1 trillion, based on the current value of gold.

The United States does not have the slightest moral or political authority to judge Cuba.It is well known that the United States Government has resorted to State terrorism as a weapon in its policy against Cuba, which has caused the deaths of 3,478 of our compatriots and injured another 2,099. It is also harbouring dozens of terrorists, some of whom live in freedom in that country, and continues with the prolonged, inhumane imprisonment and cruel and arbitrary retention on its territory of the five Cuban anti-terrorists.

Cuba strongly rejects the use of so sensitive an issue as terrorism to pursue political goals and calls for the United States Government to stop lying and put an end to this shameful exercise, which is an outrage against the Cuban people, the North American victims and the international community and discredits the cause of the struggle against terrorism.

We reiterate to the United States, on the eve of the elections in that country, our irrevocable yearning for peace and our interest in moving towards the normalization of bilateral relations through dialogue, on an equal footing and with absolute respect for our independence.

With absolute certainty, our people, come what may, with all and for the well-being of all, will continue on the path they have already chosen until they have achieved full justice.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. S.M. Krishna, Minister for External Affairs of the Republic of India.

Mr. Krishna (India): It is indeed a great privilege for me to be able to address the General Assembly. Let me begin by congratulating Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election to the office of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I assure him of our constructive support in his work over the coming year.

We are assembled in New York at a time when we face multiple global challenges that transcend national boundaries. Developing countries are still to recover from the downturn in the global economy. Their quest for poverty eradication and sustainable development remains an uphill task. Food and energy security as well as health and education for their populations remain daunting challenges. The West Asia-North Africa region is seeing unprecedented sociopolitical upheaval. The question of Palestine remains unresolved. Threats emanating from terrorism, maritime piracy, drug trafficking and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continue to multiply. Those challenges demand that we work for solutions in a concerted and coordinated manner. That is the only path to success.

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the international community renewed its commitment to sustainable development and recognized poverty eradication as the greatest global challenge. To act on that, it unequivocally reaffirmed the sanctity of the Rio principles. India remains committed to addressing climate change through a comprehensive, equitable and balanced outcome based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. In less than two weeks, in Hyderabad, we will host the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We seek the support of parties to fashion an outcome that harmonizes strong biodiversity action with our basic development objectives.

The process to develop a set of sustainable development goals has begun. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be integrated in the new framework so that the unmet development priorities continue to be the main focus. In the interim, with still three years to go to the MDG target date of 2015, it is imperative to ensure that all efforts to achieve the MDGs are made. In the global discourse on the post-2015 development agenda, the focus ought to be on the word "development". It ought to be firmly entrenched in the understandings and principles of Rio+20 and be anchored in the intergovernmental process at the United Nations. Priority must be given to the challenges of poverty, unemployment, food and energy, water, health, environmental sustainability, unsustainable lifestyles and, above all, economic growth.

Ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment is essential to the pursuit of building inclusive societies. It is also an imperative for building strong and resilient economies. We are happy to support the efforts of the United Nations. We also need to pay particular attention to upgrading the skills of young people and to ensuring employment opportunities for them. Children and youth are our future. We need to invest in them to reap the demographic dividend to secure our future.

India remains firmly committed to scaling up our development partnership with Africa, including through the framework of the India-Africa Forum Summit. Similarly, we will continue to build on our commitments for enhanced cooperation with least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States within the framework of South-South cooperation.

India is a multireligious, multi-ethnic and multilingual society. Our civilizational ethos has been underpinned by peaceful coexistence and tolerance, values that the founder of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, placed at the core of India's national life. Those principles are enshrined in our Constitution, which provides the foundation for our secular, democratic and inclusive society.

Mutual respect for deeply held religious sentiments is the bedrock of tolerance and coexistence. Unfortunate recent events have highlighted the need for enhanced dialogue among faiths and civilizations. Violence cannot lead to greater understanding. It is necessary to uphold norms of peaceful international discourse. In particular, the safety and security of diplomatic personnel should be fully respected.

Terrorism remains one of the most potent threats to international peace and security. The international community must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism and must focus on efforts to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism, including its invidious network of epicentres, training facilities and financing. It is time we demonstrated the necessary political will to agree on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism so as to strengthen the normative framework

against the increasingly sophisticated and globalized terrorist challenge.

India continues to be gravely concerned by the menace of piracy and armed robbery at sea. Apart from the major economic and commercial consequences of that scourge, it has serious humanitarian implications for the large number of seafarers held hostage by pirates. The need of the hour is once again concerted international action under United Nations auspices, with special attention to addressing the welfare of seafarers and their families.

Peacekeeping and disarmament are among the unique pursuits of the United Nations, because they embody the promise and innate potential of the Organization to make the world a better place. India has a proud history of participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations dating back to the 1950s, having taken part in as many as 43 peacekeeping operations. The challenge before the international community today is to ensure that United Nations peacekeeping is adequately resourced and enabled to meet the realities of today, including in post-conflict and peacebuilding contexts. In that regard, we are hopeful that progress will be made on all outstanding issues between the Sudan and South Sudan.

India is committed to achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. The principles of the Rajiv Gandhi action plan of 1988 for achieving nuclear disarmament in a time-bound, universal, non-discriminatory, phased and verifiable manner remain relevant, even after more than two decades. A renewed consensus on non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament must be forged. Meaningful dialogue among all States possessing nuclear weapons is needed in order to build trust and confidence and to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in international affairs and security doctrines.

Measures must be taken to reduce nuclear risks, including the grave risk of terrorists gaining access to weapons of mass destruction, and thus to strengthen nuclear security. The Conference on Disarmament — the international community's sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum — deserves our support in discharging its mandate of negotiating treaties on issues on the international disarmament agenda.

The crisis in Syria continues unabated and is a matter of serious concern for us. Any further militarization of the crisis can have catastrophic consequences for the region. We urge all parties to commit themselves to resolving the crisis without any further bloodshed through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We support the efforts of the United Nations and urge all sides to cooperate in good faith with the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi.

Support for the Palestinian cause has been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. We were privileged to receive President Mahmoud Abbas in India earlier this month. We support Palestine's aspirations for enhanced status at the United Nations. It is imperative that there be an early realization of a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

India desires constructive and friendly relations with all its neighbours. We have a vision of a peaceful, stable and prosperous region with enhanced cooperation and connectivity linking us with Central Asia, the Gulf and South-East Asia. Within South Asia, we have sought to enhance bilateral relations individually with each of our neighbours and through the aegis of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

We have embarked on a resumed dialogue process with Pakistan and advocate a step-by-step approach to normalizing our bilateral relations.

An unwarranted reference has been made from this rostrum to Jammu and Kashmir. Our principled position on the issue has been consistent and is well known. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have chosen their destiny and reaffirmed it repeatedly through India's well-established democratic processes. We wish to make it abundantly clear that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India.

India supports the Government and people of Afghanistan in their endeavour to build a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous country. We are ready to partner with the Afghan people as they rebuild their country in accordance with their own priorities and national circumstances. The continuing existence beyond Afghanistan's borders of safe havens and sanctuaries for terrorists is the major impediment to the restoration of peace and security in Afghanistan. India

is committed to creating an enabling environment in which the Afghan people can live in peace and security and decide their future for themselves, without outside interference, coercion or intimidation.

The United Nations and the norms of international relations that it has fostered remain the most efficacious means for converting today's challenges into opportunities. However, we need to ensure that the architecture of global governance reflects contemporary realities. Sticking to structures designed at the end of the Second World War only constrains multilateralism from delivering on its promises.

The most important and decisive step towards remedying that situation pertains to the Security Council, which must be expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories. A reformed Council must include countries that are capable of bearing, and willing to bear, the additional burdens relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as willilng to sustain global campaigns against new and emerging global threats. Let me also stress that we must address, sooner rather than later, the incongruity of the lack of permanent membership for Africa.

Equally, India will promote and lend its weight to enhancing the voice and participation of developing countries in decision-making in global economic and financial institutions. The quota reform process of the International Monetary Fund must be accelerated with altered quotas that reflect contemporary economic weight.

Speaking in the Assembly on 14 October 1968, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said,

> "The United Nations is the trustee of the world's peace and represents the hopes of mankind. Its very existence gives a feeling of assurance that the justice of true causes can be brought fearlessly before the world. This Assembly and the agencies of the United Nations should, in all that they do, sustain those hopes and promote the causes of peace".

Those words remain true to this day.

Let me conclude by assuring the President and the members of the Assembly that India will continue to abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and will strive to strengthen the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti.

Mr. Youssouf (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by extending my warmest congratulations to the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I have no doubt that his skills and long experience in international matters are the best guarantee of the success for our work during this session. I also wish to express my strong gratitude to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for his excellent guidance of our work and for the efficiency he showed during difficult moments throughout the sixty-sixth session. I wish him every success in his new responsibilities.

The global economic and financial context remains more troubling than ever. The successive and increasing economic and financial crises that began in 2008 affect us all. Both developed and developing countries face an uncertain environment, with economies slowed if not in recession, sluggish growth, crushing debts and deficits that threaten certain States with bankruptcy, as well as growing unemployment rates. In such a context, developing nations, in particular the least advanced, are severely impacted economically as well as socially. The negative consequences for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been enormous. In many African countries, reaching those Goals by 2015 is jeopardized despite the fact that they have spared no effort to step up implementation before the deadline.

It is in times of difficulty that we must show responsibility and solidarity by honouring our respective commitments. It is therefore important that the fate of the least advanced African countries be examined with particular attention with a view to helping them lighten their burden, improve their productive capabilities and facilitate access for their products to world markets under more favourable conditions. My Government calls for the comprehensive implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (A/CONF.219/3/Rev.1).

The current financial and economic crises have multidimensional consequences in Africa; any effort to resolve them must take into account Africa's specific needs and must ensure that commitments made at international meetings are implemented. I take this opportunity to welcome the establishment of

a United Nations monitoring mechanism to review the commitments made related to Africa's development.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June was an opportunity for all Governments to renew their commitment to a sustainable development that embraces the economic, social and environmental spheres. It is important that our shared political will be swiftly transformed into action and that the work we put into the Rio commitments for "The future we want" becomes a reality.

The elimination of poverty remains an absolute priority on the path to sustainable development. It is a major challenge for many countries of the world, including those of the Horn of Africa. Our region is suffering enormously from the adverse effects of climate change, and has been for a number of years. Trapped in the cycle of chronic droughts and floods, our most vulnerable people are seeing their means of subsistence destroyed and their productive capacity and access to sufficient, nutritious food hampered. Our Government has implemented social policies designed to relieve the burden of extreme poverty and its corollary, hunger, and hopes its partners will continue their support by acting in accord with the national priorities, within a long-term approach that will enable us to move from emergency operations geared to the relief of affected populations to a perspective of sustainable development.

That means, from the emergency stage onward, a comprehensive global approach accompanied by efforts to guarantee women, children and men the right to food. Guaranteeing food security to our fellow citizens remains our priority. I am convinced that the goals of the Secretary-General's Zero Hunger initiative are achievable, because they have been developed within the perspective of an integrated, effective strategy to eliminate hunger that involves all actors.

I wish to acknowledge the support of our partners, who have spared no effort to help us reach that goal, especially in the efforts to reduce the disparities between rural and urban populations and to develop our agricultural production. In that regard, my country has implemented a number of agricultural infrastructure projects, including the development of arable land in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia and the Sudan and a project to capture the water of the Awash River on the Ethiopian border when it floods.

Access to potable water and water purification continue to be a critical goal for my country, which is unfortunately on the list of those deficient in potable water and which is considered a country at risk of water shortages in the next 25 years. For most countries in our situation, the effects of climate change accentuate existing disparities.

Sustainable development must take an approach focused on meeting the needs of populations. Women, children and young people should be the target of any implementation policy derived from the Rio+20 outcome document (resolution 66/288, annex) and of all discussions geared to formulating the post-2015 development agenda. Human capital is my country's main asset, and that is why my Government devotes particular attention to its development. Social policies are being developed around the goal of promoting and enhancing the rights and well-being of young people and women. It is a national priority to guarantee gender equality and to empower women through access to health care and protect them from all forms of discrimination and violence. My Government therefore welcomes the African Union initiative recommending that at its sixty-seventh session the Assembly adopt a draft resolution aimed at intensifying efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation from the world. We welcome the measures undertaken by the African Group in New York to that effect.

Youth, which is our future, constitutes a sure asset for the African continent. Indeed, almost 65 per cent of the African population is under the age of 35. It goes without saying that addressing their present and ensuring their social well-being is the way to success for our country. The challenges are enormous given the global economic stagnation. My Government has therefore set up social policies and programmes in order to respond to the specific needs of young people in the areas of education, health care and employment.

On behalf of the Republic of Djibouti, I would like to reiterate my warmest congratulations to the new President of the Somali Republic, Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and to his people on having taken the first step towards the reconciliation and stabilization of Somalia and on having found the necessary resources to overcome all obstacles on the way. The civil and peaceful climate among the candidates at the time of the election and the maturity that they showed throughout an historic and inclusive electoral process must be commended. Those realities are the best guarantee of success for the future. The hope of seeing a reconciled and peaceful Somalia is in sight.

A new phase in the country's political life is beginning for the Somali people after more than 20 years of suffering and violence. The momentum and enthusiasm prompted by those elections among Somalis in the diaspora and within the country are unprecedented. However, at this point it is crucial to address two major challenges. The short-term priorities, namely, security, good governance and economic recovery, are challenges that the Somali Government cannot overcome alone.

Somalia is at a crossroads and will need more than ever the support and cooperation of all its partners and friends. Donors and the international financial institutions must stand beside the new Somali leadership in order to help fulfil its new vision and to improve the lives of Somalis as soon as possible. Their action must be strengthened, coordinated and consistent with the priorities of the new Government as there are many challenges to overcome. Those challenges range from restoring the security services to access to justice and from establishing the rule of law to respect for human rights, not to mention the problems of terrorism and piracy off the Somali coast, which will not disappear in the short term.

In short, it is clear that the end of the transition in Somalia does not mean the completion of the peace process. Politically, it is important that all phases of the road map be implemented and that the political dialogue continue. From the humanitarian point of view, the situation remains critical. Millions of Somalis need humanitarian assistance and have no means of subsistence. The problem of refugees and internally displaced persons also remains a source of concern.

Restoring security and maintaining it is not the easiest thing in Somalia giving the new upsurge in the terrorist acts and guerrilla tactics of extremist groups, such as Al-Shabaab, despite the undeniable success of the troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and of the Somali and Ethiopian security forces.

I would like to pay tribute here to the memory of the late Meles Zenawi, former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, who made peace his centrepiece. I would also like to express admiration for the tireless efforts and heavy sacrifices of the AMISOM troops, the Somali Security Forces and the allied forces. Their contribution was and remains invaluable to improving the security situation in Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. The international community must ensure the continued, predictable and reliable financing of the AMISOM troops so that the reconciliation, stabilization and peacebuilding strategy continues and reaches all Somalia.

In that regard, strengthening the security gains is crucial. The countries in the region — Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti — have done useful work and continue to serve the noble cause of peace. However, the transformation of the AMISOM forces into a United Nations peacekeeping force now seems inevitable. We can no longer avoid that issue. It is up to the Security Council to take that timely decision.

I would also like to launch an appeal for the convening of a donor conference in order to mobilize resources for the reconstruction of the Somali economy. I am convinced that we are all aware of the necessity of meeting the individual recovery, reintegration and reconstruction needs of countries emerging from conflict. Somalia is no exception. Here at the United Nations, we must consider the steps to be taken, in particular by the Peacebuilding Commission.

The theme of the General Assembly this year — "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" — is relevant given the many conflicts in the world that threaten international peace and security. Our region, the Horn of Africa, has unfortunately not been spared. As members know, my country, which had successfully preserved the peace, was attacked and brought into a border conflict by Eritrea in June 2008.

Since then, the Government has spared no effort to resolve the dispute peacefully within regional and international organizations. In the conviction that dialogue is possible, my Government accepted the good offices of His Royal Highness the Emir of Qatar and his mediation. On the ground, that took the form of deploying Qatari troops at the border between Djibouti and Eritrea and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Island. The Security Council adopted resolutions 1862 (2009), 1907 (2009) and 2023 (2011) to express the concern of the international community in the light of that new crisis in the Horn of Africa.

To date, two and a half years after the signing of the mediation agreement, we are still waiting for the demarcation of the border and the return of our prisoners of war. The request for the release of the Djibouti prisoners and the implementation of resolution 1862 (2009) remain sensitive issues for my country.

My Government remains convinced that mediation is the path that will enable us to achieve peace. We will never stop believing in the virtues of dialogue, which is the only way for our region to strengthen the gains of peace.

The events that have taken place in the world in recent weeks following the dissemination of an anti-Islam film and of caricatures denigrating the image of the Prophet of Islam cannot and must not leave the international community indifferent. The tragic consequences that led in particular to the loss of human lives demand our attention. Political and religious leaders and all people of goodwill must form a common front against extremist and fanatical excesses of all kinds. Given the desire of some to spread religious intolerance, States Members of the United Nations must ensure that the provisions of the Human Rights Council consensus resolution 16/18 and General Assembly consensus resolution 66/167 provide the answer.

While all legal steps must be taken to ensure freedom of expression, it is just as important that malicious acts that incite people to religious hatred, discrimination, violence and intimidation through negative stereotypes, as well as violence and discrimination on the basis of religion, in particular against Muslims or any other group, must be condemned and rejected, in accordance with the relevant human rights instruments.

Given their increasing role in our modern societies, the media and social networks have responsibilities and must be on the side of those who contribute to understanding and respect among the various cultures and civilizations. It is more urgent than ever to be on the side of tolerance, moderation and reason. All initiatives and actions that promote peace in minds and hearts and mutual understanding among peoples must be encouraged.

The establishment of the United Nations gave rise to immense hope in the world following the Second World War and symbolized the will of all peoples of the world not to be plunged again into the throes of war. The Organization has been a forum for all nations under colonization and a platform for them to acquire sovereignty and to free themselves from domination.

However, it seems that, since 1947, there has been an exception, to the detriment of the Palestinian people. Palestine still lives under occupation, which today is morally reprehensible and politically unacceptable. It is high time that justice be delivered to the Palestinian people and that the peace process between the Palestinian authorities and the occupying force succeed. Freedom, justice, dignity and respect for human rights are the only bastions against extremist excesses. The international community has a moral duty and a political responsibility to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, which has lasted for more than 60 years.

History is on the side of those that show the political courage required to achieve peace and to give the peoples concerned hope for a better life. The recognition of a Palestinian State as a fully-fledged Member of the United Nations by the General Assembly is the first step in the solidarity that the international community owes to the Palestinian people, who have shown patience and selflessness until now.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić and his friendly country, the Republic of Serbia, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session and to wish him every success in conducting our work in a way that restores to the Assembly President his important and neutral role in fulfilling his duties without regard for any political, national or international agendas that violate the rules of international law and contradict efforts to achieve security and stability in the world. We also wish the Secretary-General every success in carrying out his duties and enhancing the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Our world today faces many events that are affecting its States and continue to cast their shadow on the international arena. Many countries are facing political, economic and financial crises, whose their negative consequences exceed the capacity of States to cope with them individually.

While the peoples of the world await effective and coordinated international efforts to overcome those crises, the situation indicates instead an escalation of hegemony and domination over the fortunes and potentials of nations and peoples in a way that contradicts the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter and the norms of international law.

Instead of seeking to contribute to the settlement of regional and international disputes by peaceful means, some well-known countries continue to pursue new colonial policies based on political hypocrisy in dealing with those crises. Under the pretext of humanitarian intervention, these countries interfere in the domestic affairs of States and impose unilateral economic sanctions that lack any moral or legal basis. Under the pretext of concepts such as the responsibility to protect, the drums of war are beaten and the seeds of sedition and unrest are sown to damage the structure of national societies. Perhaps worse of all, permanent members of the Security Council, who have launched wars under the pretext of combating terrorism, now support terrorism in my country, without any regard for United Nations resolutions that established the regulations and mechanisms for concerted international efforts to fight this scourge without political polarization or double standards.

For over a year now, my country has faced organized terrorism that has affected our citizens, our human and scientific cadres, our national institutions and many of Syria's historic and archeological landmarks through terrorist bombings, assassinations, massacres, looting and acts of sabotage that have horrified citizens in many parts of the country. The most recent example is the terrorist bombing that took place in Damascus on 26 September. A terrorist group under the name of the Al-Nusra Front, one of Al-Qaida's affiliates, took responsibility for that attack.

It is no surprise that the Security Council has failed to condemn this and other terrorist bombings, as some of its members support such acts. This terrorism is externally supported and is accompanied by unprecedented media incitement seeking to ignite religious extremism sponsored by well-known States in the region. Those States facilitate the flow of arms, money and fighters through the borders of some neighbouring countries. They also turn a blind eye to the activities of terrorist groups crossing their borders, while others provide active material and logistical support from their territory for such groups.

These facts lead me to question whether the international consensus among Member States on combating terrorism was serious or merely ink on paper. How should we understand the explicit request by the United States to the armed terrorist groups not to surrender their arms in response to amnesty decrees and decisions issued by the Syrian leadership? We also wonder about the statements by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, France and others who explicitly induce and support terrorism in Syria with money, weapons and foreign fighters. To what extent are those statements in line with those countries' international responsibility to combat terrorism?

One of the ironies that we face today is evident in the efforts to encourage extremists in countries within and outside our region to go to the Syrian border and enter the country to carry out terrorist acts under the banner of jihad, in collaboration with terrorists from within the country. This is a fact that has been confirmed by reports by both international and Arab observers. To this very day, and as a result of this terrorism, Syria has lost thousands of martyrs from among its military ranks and its civilians. This is the price that Syria has paid for its efforts to defend the integrity of the Syrian State and its citizens in the face of that global terrorist campaign.

The Syrian Government called for dialogue at the beginning of the events in my country, but there was no positive response from most opposition parties. Moreover, my Government responded positively throughout the crisis to each and every sincere initiative aimed at finding a peaceful solution based on national dialogue among Syrians, rejecting external manipulation, stopping the shedding of Syrian blood and preserving the unity of Syria and its future.

Based on this principled position, Syria cooperated with the Arab observer mission and the subsequent international initiatives linked to the work of the Joint Special Envoy, Kofi Annan. We did so despite the conviction of the Syrian leadership that there are no sincere intentions on the part of certain regional and international parties who push for the escalation of the Syrian crisis, fuel its fire and prolong it by thwarting all attempts for dialogue, and insist on creating a state of instability to ensure the need for foreign interference.

Syria, on the basis of its principled position, received the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS), and furnished it with all the facilities needed to enable it to deploy in record time. The Syrian leadership also announced its full commitment to the implementation of the six-point plan presented by Mr. Annan and started the practical implementation of its provisions. It also welcomed the Geneva communiqué (A/66/865, annex) that stressed the need for the implementation of those provisions.

However, the armed groups sought to exploit the Syrian Government's commitment to the plan and the Geneva communiqué in order to make gains on the ground and expand the area of their presence. In addition, the statements issued by some Western and Arab countries exposed the actors and States working to thwart these initiatives.

Syria welcomed the appointment of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as the Joint Special Representative, succeeding Mr. Annan, and stressed its willingness to cooperate fully with him based on the principles agreed on by the international community, in particular the six-point plan and the Geneva final communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). I should point out that, in addition to the commitment of the Syrian Government, the success of any international effort requires that the States supporting armed groups in my country — in particular Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Libya, among others — stop arming, funding, training and harbouring armed terrorist groups, and instead encourage dialogue and renounce violence.

For more than a year now, we have said that what my country is witnessing is a two-sided problem: one side is based on the need for the political, economic and social reforms that the public demands; the other is based on the exploitation of those public needs and demands in the service of goals that are completely unconnected to the demands of the Syrian people and their interests, and for which those peaceful demands are being used as a vehicle for armed groups working to sow sedition and undermine security in my country.

I referred to that in my statement from this rostrum last year (see A/66/PV.25). I have returned today to tell the Assembly that the Syrian Government has taken serious and important steps towards reform, culminating in a new Constitution that embraces political pluralism and that has been adopted by popular referendum. As a result, parliamentary elections open to multiple political parties were held. I can also say that Syria is continuing to work with patriotic members of the opposition to build a new and pluralist Syria that is responsive to its people's aspirations. At the same time, Syria is determined to fulfil its duty to protect its people from jihadist and *takfiri* terrorism, which armed terrorist groups are using to spread chaos and sedition among Syrians, threatening their peaceful coexistence.

There have been calls from this rostrum and at other forums asking the President of the Syrian Arab Republic to step down, made by people who are ignorant of or ignore the facts, or who have a stake in distorting them. That is blatant interference in the domestic affairs of Syria, which undermines the unity of its people and the sovereignty of its decision-making. Only the people of Syria have the right to choose their own future and the form of their State — one that accommodates all groups and parties covering the entire spectrum of the Syrian people, including those who have been deceived and misled. It is the Syrian people who will choose their leadership through the ballot box, which is the most important tool of democracy and democratic expression.

If some of the countries that are interfering in Syria's internal affairs are proud of their democracy and their people's freedom to choose, it would be better for them to support us on our democratic path and leave the Syrian people to choose their leaders through elections, whose form has been set by the new Constitution and the relevant legislation, after which the ballot box will have the final say. I say to those countries that we have had enough of illusions, and I invite the national opposition to work together to stop the shedding of Syrian blood, to sit at the negotiation table and to participate in building the present and future.

We are not betting on any party or faction apart from the Syrian people, who are uniformly determined to reject all forms of foreign interference in their domestic affairs and to defeat the advocates of sectarianism, extremism and terrorism, because in my country the links between State policies and the aspirations of the people are very strong.

Despite everything I have described about what my country is experiencing, we still believe in a political solution as the essential way out of this crisis. From this rostrum I call, first, on all parties and political groups and factions, inside and outside Syria, to engage in a constructive dialogue under the aegis of our homeland. The doors of Syria, like its heart, are open to anyone who wants constructive dialogue. To that end, I call on all countries represented in the General Assembly to exert pressure to end the violence in my country by putting a stop to the arming, financing, harbouring and training of armed terrorist groups. Secondly, the results of that national dialogue, after being agreed on by all parties, will determine the map and future direction of the country towards establishing a more pluralistic and democratic Syria.

The events in Syria have produced a surge in humanitarian needs in several key sectors in areas affected by *takfiri* terrorist groups, which has led to

deteriorating living conditions for Syrian citizens who live there. While my Government is working hard to meet the basic needs of citizens who have been forced to flee their homes by the violence of armed groups, some have sought to fabricate a refugee crisis in neighbouring countries by inciting armed groups to intimidate Syrian civilians in border areas, forcing them to flee to those countries. There they are accommodated in military training bases or camps that resemble places of detention, in arid or rugged regions. Their plight is being exploited in order to secure aid that is mostly spent on things that have nothing to do with humanitarian purposes. I appeal to those Syrian citizens from this rostrum to return to their towns and villages, where the State will guarantee their safe return and dignified lives, free from the inhuman conditions they are enduring in those camps.

At this point, I would like to ask a legitimate question about the credibility of those who claim to care about providing humanitarian assistance in response to Syrian citizens' needs, and about how such claims correspond with a policy of tightening unilateral economic sanctions that have a severe effect on those same citizens' living conditions, whose interests those imposing the sanctions claim to serve. How can imposing sanctions on the banking, health, transport and other sectors be consistent with caring for Syrians' best interests?

I also wonder if the legitimate public demands of our citizens, to which the Syrian leadership has responded transparently and sincerely, justify their being used by some as an excuse to continue providing every kind of military, financial and media support to those who are killing innocent people in Syria — who include journalists, doctors, university professors and even religious figures. Or is this simply another practical interpretation of the concept of creative chaos, which contributes only to strengthening Western hegemony over Mediterranean countries, and serves only Israel's expansionist interests?

What is happening in my country must not lead us to lose our basic focus, which is Palestine and the Syrian Golan. The Syrian Arab Republic therefore reaffirms its natural right to recover all of the occupied Syrian Golan up to the 4 June 1967 borders. Syria underscores its rejection of all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to change the natural geographic and other aspects of the Golan, in clear violation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Coucil, in particular resolution 497 (1981).

Syria renews its support for the legitimate call on the international community to recognize a free and independent Palestinian State on the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. As everyone knows, the failure of efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of the international terms of reference endorsed by the international community as a basis for peace between Palestinians and Israelis is due to the unilateral positions and actions of Israel, especially Israel's insistence on continuing its settlement policy and its evasion of the requirements of peace.

My country renews its call for the international community to work to rid the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction. In that context, we recall the initiative put forward by Syria in late 2003, during its tenure as a non-permanent member in the Security Council for the period 2002 to 2003, and we call on the Council to adopt it. Syria stresses that ridding the region of all weapons of mass destruction cannot be achieved without forcing Israel, the only nuclear Power in the region, to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to place its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive inspections regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. At the same time, we emphasize the Treaty's provisions guaranteeing the right of every State to acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

The insistence of the United States and countries of the European Union and others to impose unilateral economic measures violates the rules and norms of international law and the principles of free trade. It also raises questions about the legality and morality of such practices. On that basis, we call for the lifting of the embargo that the United States has imposed against Cuba for decades. We also renew our call for ending all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the peoples of other countries, such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Our aspiration to achieve a positive reform of this international Organization stems from our desire to create a world based on justice, security and prosperity for all the peoples of the world, free from the colonial and hegemonic tendencies of some countries that seek

to exploit the United Nations to achieve their own interests at the expense of other countries.

We hope that the United Nations can take the peoples of the world to a better future that fulfils their aspirations for life, coexistence, development and food sufficiency, free from all forms of tension, confrontation and war, in accordance with the purpopses and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which seek to preserve the sovereignty and equality of States in rights and duties.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Maxine Pamela Ometa McClean, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. McClean (Barbados): On behalf of my delegation, I have the honour to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, on his election. I assure him of the full support and cooperation of the delegation of Barbados during his presidency. Let me also convey my appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, for his able leadership during that session.

The theme of this year's session, "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", underscores a core principle of the Charter of the United Nations. In the current global environment, where challenges to international peace and security are widespread, it is important to reaffirm the validity of that principle as one of the cornerstones on which the Organization is founded.

As a small island developing State, Barbados is severely challenged by the global financial and economic crisis and the recession that has resulted from it. Moreover, climate change and other environmental challenges continue to pose significant threats to the achievements of Barbados since its independence, in November 1966. As a relatively young nation, our independence was achieved by negotiation rather than by war. We have enjoyed the benefits of stability for more than 370 years of unbroken parliamentary Government. We are a peace-loving, democratic nation, extremely proud of our political and economic stability. Our relatively peaceful situation does not mean that we are insulated or isolated from the prevailing global instability that is very evident today. Our political and social stability have facilitated the achievement of a standard of living that has led Barbados to be consistently ranked among the top 50 nations in the United Nations Development Programme's annual Human Development Index.

Mr. Balé (Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Such a status has been achieved as a result of the commitment of successive Governments to invest heavily in our people, particularly in education, health and other social safety nets. As a nation poor in natural resources, we have placed priority on our greatest resource, our people. A significant factor in our ability to overcome our constraints at the national level has been the tripartite social partnership comprising Government, workers' unions and employers. The partnership grew out of an economic crisis during the early 1990s and continues to function effectively today. Those strategies have been reinforced by our commitment to observing the rule of law. We are a principled country that firmly adheres to the core values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the rule of the law, respect for human rights and the principle of sovereign equality.

We have been classified as a middle-income developing country. In reality, we are a small island developing State, characterized by high debt, high vulnerability to external shocks, and susceptibility to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. The global economic and environmental situation has had a disproportionate effect on our successful, but nevertheless vulnerable, economy. We bear the burden of rising food and fuel prices and a decline in foreign investment. Our efforts to address those threats have been severely undermined by international financial and cooperation mechanisms that fail to take account of the vulnerability and capacity constraints that we face Barbados and similar vulnerable countries have been graduated from grant and concessionary financing by multilateral institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, without regard for our unique situation. There is a clear need for greater equity, fairness and transparency in the process used to determine classifications and resource allocation. The persistent use of international classification and ratings systems that are solely based on gross domestic product per capita and other narrow criteria must be expanded in scope to take into account meaningful variables such as vulnerability.

In this context, we welcome the assertion by the Secretary-General that the use of per capita income to

classify countries as a means of guiding development cooperation disregards the nature and multidimensional nature of development. Barbados endorses the need for the adoption of new indices and measures of development and applauds the ongoing work of bodies such as the Commonwealth and the United Nations Statistical Commission to develop new indices.

There is no greater threat to the survival, viability and indeed the security of my country and other small island developing States (SIDS) than the threat posed by climate change. Science continues to warn that we are on the threshold of irreversible and potentially catastrophic changes to the global climate system. Global emissions, the main cause of human-induced climate change, are rising at their fastest rate in history, even as we bear witness to massive and accelerating ice loss from the ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica and a doubling of the rate of sea-level rise.

We are at a major turning point in the history of mankind. Are we willing to sacrifice the most vulnerable members of the international community? That is the stark choice we face. But after the islands disappear, who will be next? Inaction or inadequate action is inexcusable and morally indefensible, given the level of certainty of the scientific evidence before us and the technological and financial tools at our disposal to effect the necessary change.

While some useful progress was made at the Durban Climate Change Conference in December last year, we are not close to finding a solution to the problem. Barbados welcomes the decision taken in Durban to launch negotiations on a new legally binding agreement that would take effect after 2020. However, for us a post-2020 agreement is meaningless if ambitious actions are not taken now to reduce global emissions and provide finance and technology to vulnerable developing countries. That is essential if we are to adapt to the ever-worsening impacts of climate change. The upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference in Doha must therefore prioritize the pre-2020 actions necessary to ensure that the world is on track in 2020 to meet the below 2 degree or 1.5 degree globally agreed goals. Such actions will require clarity from developed countries on the scale of climate finance after the end of the fast-start finance period this year and a greater sense of urgency and ambition in reducing global emissions before 2020 to minimize and avoid potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change.

Barbados and other small island developing States have thrown their full support behind the Secretary-General's Sustainable Energy for All initiative. In May this year, the Government of Barbados, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, hosted a High-level Conference of the small island developing States on achieving sustainable energy for all in SIDS, focused on challenges, opportunities and commitments. At that meeting the Barbados Declaration was adopted, outlining an ambitious and action-oriented agenda for achieving the goal of sustainable energy for all in SIDS. As a concrete expression of our solid determination, some 22 SIDS agreed to inscribe, in an annex to the Declaration, a spectrum of ambitious voluntary commitments to promote transformational activities in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy access and low-carbon development.

I commend the Governments of Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom for pledging, in the Barbados Declaration, to support SIDS in the implementation of our ambitious commitments. We urge other development partners to join us on this journey to ensure our energy independence. For us, sustainable development is not possible without sustainable energy.

Barbados shares the view of the Secretary-General that the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) in Brazil this year reached a number of important milestones. In the words of the Prime Minister of Barbados,

> "Rio +20 will be remembered as that unique moment in time when we decided not to yield to our fears, but rather to transform this present period of global uncertainty and volatility into a major opportunity to set new agendas, which can then be developed more fully over the next few years".

Barbados welcomes the agreement at Rio to convene the third Global Conference on SIDS in 2014, some two decades after the convening of the first SIDS Conference in Barbados. The international community can be assured that Barbados will do its part to ensure the success of the Conference.

During this session, the Assembly will consider a draft resolution on the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. Within the Caribbean we have recognized that an integrated management approach that involves all stakeholders provides us with the best option for protecting the Caribbean Sea, our most

valuable shared resource. Barbados has led the regional effort in the Association of Caribbean States to create the Caribbean Sea Commission. The Commission represents an oceans governance framework to promote cooperation towards effective management of the Caribbean Sea area. Barbados calls on the international community to support this initiative, including through the designation by the General Assembly of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

Citizen security remains a major concern for Barbados. The Caribbean Community subregion has become a major transit and destination point for the trafficking of illicit drugs and firearms. As a consequence, the incidence of crime and violence continues to escalate in the region and threatens to reverse many of our economic and social gains. Developing countries like ours have been compelled to divert financial and other resources earmarked for social and economic development for use in combating this transnational scourge.

The heavy toll that that takes on the populations of our region brings into sharp focus the importance of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It also emphasizes the need for a strong, legally binding arms trade treaty, which sets the highest possible international standards for the transfer of conventional arms. We share the profound disappointment of many Member States at the failure of the Arms Trade Treaty Conference to reach agreement on a treaty text before its conclusion. Barbados cannot envisage an arms trade treaty that does not include small arms and light weapons, their components and ammunition. Barbados expects that, despite the setback, negotiations on the arms trade treaty will resume during this session.

At the national level, we are appreciative of continuing cooperation with bilateral partners and regional and international bodies like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These include programmes aimed at preventing and reducing levels of violence and crime in our society. We look forward to the imminent reopening of the UNODC Office for the Caribbean subregion, which my Government has offered once again to host.

It is well recognized that peace, security and development are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. Barbados is therefore heartened that in dealing with conflict prevention, the United Nations has moved beyond traditional preventive diplomacy. We support the pursuit of comprehensive strategies that address deep-rooted structural causes of conflict, poverty eradication and development, human rights and the rule of law, elections and the building of democratic institutions.

As a family of nations, we continue to strive for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Success has been mixed, and made more difficult by the current global financial crisis. The target implementation date of 2015 looms large, and we share international concerns that the MDGs may become casualties of the current environment. As we articulate the post-2015 development agenda, we must not lose sight of the urgency of fulfilling these goals.

Let me reiterate my country's commitment to the rule of law and our unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. I take this opportunity to speak out against the continued unilateral imposition of the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba by the United States. Barbados joins the overwhelming majority of Member States in opposing this action, which has persisted for too long. This situation merits immediate resolution if the unnecessary hardship and suffering it has wrought on the Cuban people is to end. We therefore encourage constructive engagement between the two sides.

Strong, functioning democracies are the foundation on which international peace, security and prosperity are built. As a democratic State with a longstanding and firm commitment to effective multilateralism, Barbados reiterates the crucial nexus between development, peace, security and human rights. The United Nations is the only global body with the unquestionable legitimacy to lead a global response to the challenges facing humanity. Recognizing this, Barbados remains steadfast in its commitment to the United Nations and all it stands for.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Osman Mohammed Saleh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea.

Mr. Saleh (Eritrea): Let me start by extending my sincere congratulations to the President of the General Assembly and his country, Serbia, upon his election to

preside over the sixty-seventh session. I am confident that, with his extensive experience and diplomatic skill, he will lead this session of the General Assembly to a successful conclusion. I pledge the support of the Eritrean delegation for his noble efforts for the common good.

I wish to pay profound tribute to the outgoing President, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for his commendable work at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly. He indeed served us well. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership and his report (A/67/2) on the work of our United Nations at the outset of this general debate.

Almost seven decades have elapsed since the establishment of the United Nations, and, undoubtedly, the world has seen much political, economic, social and technological progress. However, it is clear that the United Nations has not succeeded in its paramount purpose of saving humankind from the scourge of war. In the past 67 years, there has hardly been one in which no war raged somewhere in the world. What is particularly significant is the fact that in most of these wars, the major Powers were the main architects and actors — those same Powers which, by virtue of their position in the Security Council, should have shouldered the greatest responsibility in the maintenance of peace and stability.

On another front, and again despite the progress made, in the twenty-first century, hundreds of millions of people in the developing world, as well as in developed countries, continue to suffer from the scourge of poverty, easily preventable diseases and avoidable premature deaths.

In addition to the twin scourges of war and poverty, our world now faces an environmental threat that puts human livelihoods and survival at risk. It is therefore disconcerting that the current global political, economic and security architecture is inadequate to address the challenges that we all face. The United Nations system, as has been repeatedly pointed out, is indeed outdated. The General Assembly has been emasculated. The Security Council is dominated by one powerful permanent member, and is increasingly becoming paralysed. Change is being resisted by those who believe they have benefited from the old, anachronistic order. Respect for the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of nations and non-interference in their internal affairs — which constitute the pillars of international law and the Charter of the United Nations — are being eroded and wilfully flouted. The noble aims of protecting human rights and civilian lives are being selectively and cynically employed to justify military aggression, external intervention and imposition of sanctions — collective as well as unilateral — to destabilize nations, change Governments and gain economic advantages.

This summary assessment, Eritrea believes, is shared by the majority of States Members of the United Nations. It is indeed the position of Africa, of most developing countries, the Non-Aligned Movement, the emerging Powers and many in the developed world. What this emerging consensus now needs is a concerted and coordinated effort to effect real change, including in the United Nations system, that would lead to a more peaceful, just and equitable world.

No part of the world is in need of positive change more than the African continent, which remains marginalized and almost voiceless. And yet Africa is a continent of massive potential, and there are already unmistakable, if tentative, signs of its awakening. A number of African countries are taking serious steps in the economic, political and social arenas and the revitalization of the African Union proceeds apace. We hope that this African initiative, which will have a salutary effect on the world economy and international governance, will be supported by a more conducive international environment and by the United Nations.

Eritrea is convinced that our subregion, the Horn of Africa, will overcome its current difficulties and make a substantial contribution to the re-emergence of a dynamic and prosperous Africa. Despite the difficulties it has faced, it has made remarkable progress in providing and caring for its people and rebuilding its economy, and has embarked on modernizing its infrastructure, including developing renewable energy, with the perspective of regional trade, investment and integration. It will continue to work to ensure a life of dignity and prosperity for its citizens, in a peaceful and cooperative region, and a more just and equitable world.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. G. L. Peiris, Minister for External Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Peiris (Sri Lanka): On behalf of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, I congratulate Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

His proven skills and charming personality leave no room for doubt that under his able leadership we will achieve our goals for this session. Sri Lanka is also pleased to endorse the theme proposed by him for this year's high-level debate.

For 67 years, the United Nations has provided the premier forum for the resolution of international disputes and the negotiation of landmark global goals. In the conduct of international relations, Sri Lanka, a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, firmly upholds the tenets of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, equality and mutual benefit. Sri Lanka believes that, in the settlement of international disputes, action must be based on the fundamental principle of the sovereign equality of States, a principle firmly enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The noticeable recent tendency to selectively and arbitrarily intervene in the internal affairs of States flies in the face of this principle and dilutes the confidence so carefully nurtured in the United Nations system.

The global financial crisis has posed a major challenge to the entire international community. In this context, it is of the greatest importance to ensure that any strategies employed to achieve recovery do not impose unjustifiable burdens on developing countries, as they strive to achieve better living conditions for their people. A recovery that does not simultaneously uplift developing countries will be, by its very nature, unsustainable. It is paradoxical that the very countries in which the financial crisis originated now seek to provide policy prescriptions for others.

It has been noted that many countries of the South have weathered the financial storm successfully. Sri Lanka's economy, which has been carefully managed during this period, is one of the Asian economies that has recorded impressive gains by any standard. A growth rate of 8.2 per cent was achieved in 2011. Following the end of the conflict in 2009, the areas formerly controlled by terrorists, namely the northern province, recorded a 27 per cent growth in gross domestic product in 2011. The exponential boom in agriculture and fisheries in particular has contributed substantially to this result.

We are now at a significant juncture in human history, as climate change looms as the greatest challenge to the very existence of humanity. Many developing countries, including my own, are still struggling to regain lost opportunities and improve the livelihood of their people while staring global warming in the face. Our carbon footprint remains negligible. It is imperative that the developed world deliver on its solemn undertakings to assist developing countries, as we seek the common goal of arresting climate change, which is caused by human activities.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June 2012, demonstrated convincingly the efficacy of United Nations processes. The potential of the green economy, however, will be less attractive if we do not clearly understand its long-term consequences at the national level for sustainable economic strategies. The transition to a green economy must not generate negative externalities that retard economic growth and perpetuate societal inequity and poverty. Assistance to developing countries under North-South development cooperation mechanisms must take into account global initiatives to mitigate the adverse consequences of too rigid an application of green economic principles. The efforts of developing countries themselves in this regard must be recognized and further facilitated.

As Member States, we must respect the principles patiently negotiated by the international community. These are, in particular, the equality of rights, the equal sovereignty of all States and the right to development, as underlined in the Rio+20 outcome document (resolution 66/288, annex). The interests of the developing world must be entrenched and protected. Hence, no constraining conditions should be applied to development models or approaches adopted by Member States that could prevent the achievement of sustainable development together with the eradication of poverty.

The middle-income countries are the main driving force for strengthening our global economy. Sri Lanka's balanced socioeconomic policy strategies propelled us to middle-income status a few years ago. As we have repeatedly emphasized, countries' attainment of middle-income status does not by itself provide a solution to the issue of poverty and other development challenges.

I wish to mention in particular that Sri Lanka employs a unique development strategy that empowers citizens, with special attention to social development needs. It has continued to achieve transformational change in the lives of its people by effectively mobilizing available resources and delivering sustainable and citizen-centred programmes. Sri Lanka

has emphasized synergistic interactions between health care and education, public infrastructure development, including improved water and sanitation, transport and communications, especially under an integrated regional development approach, which we consider to be important. We also enjoy a 98 per cent literacy rate, with the score for girls being even higher. The success of this strategy is reflected in Sri Lanka's high ranking on the human development index, of which we are legitimately proud.

Sri Lanka has achieved many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is well on track to realize all of them by 2015, including the eradication of poverty. Eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life of our people has been the cornerstone of social development policies in Sri Lanka over many decades. Sri Lanka's key policy document, "Mahinda Chintana —Vision for the Future", has set specific targets to combat poverty within the MDG framework. A range of projects has been designed for the eradication of poverty by 2016. Through the Gama Naguma and Divi Naguma programmes, which deal with village awakening and the enhancement of livelihoods and incomes, we have been addressing rural poverty eradication and ensuring food security. These programmes continue to promote the concept of self-employment, directing financial and technical assistance to youth and women in rural areas, including those who suffered from the terrorist conflict.

The contribution of women in Sri Lanka's successful realization of most of the MDGs is of great significance. Women who are literate also encourage their children to focus on education and aspire to higher goals. It is through the participation of women that Sri Lanka has been recognized for its achievements in the World Health Organization breastfeeding promotion and immunization programmes. I note with great pride that Sri Lanka produced the first elected woman Prime Minister in the world in 1960.

We have made genuine efforts to ensure that the fruits of economic development are equally distributed and are accessible, especially to the most vulnerable segments of society. We have ensured that social mobility is not confined to the privileged in the towns and cities of the island, but penetrates deep into the rural hinterland.

Three years ago, our Government ended the terrorist challenge largely through its own efforts. Sri Lanka is firmly committed to redressing the grievances of all parties affected by the internal conflict. After the release of the report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, a local mechanism set in place by the President of Sri Lanka, an action plan to give expeditious effect to its recommendations was adopted. A comprehensive national action plan for human rights with specific timelines has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Government has also proposed a transparent and democratic process under a parliamentary select committee to address post-conflict reconciliation issues. That initiative has, regrettably, been delayed by the failure of some opposition parties to nominate their representatives.

Sri Lanka exemplifies the challenges faced by a society emerging from the shadow of a sustained conflict that spanned three decades; the country is now entering an era of peace and tranquillity. The gradual diminution of the challenges and the brevity of the period that has elapsed since the end of the conflict leave no room for doubt as to the degree of success achieved by the Government of Sri Lanka with respect to a wide range of issues relating to development and reconciliation. It has only been about three years since the conflict ended.

Prioritization was a central feature of the Government's plan of action. The progress on the ground during the last three years with regard to the resettlement of internally displaced persons; the reintegration into society of thousands of ex-combatants after exposure to programmes of livelihood skills training, which equipped them to earn their living with dignity and independence; the rapid completion of the mine-clearance process; and the unprecedented focus on infrastructure development leading to very visible invigoration of the economy of the island as a whole, and the Northern province in particular, are quite apparent.

The experience of Sri Lanka demonstrates that, with the dynamic leadership of high quality and the unwavering commitment that President Mahinda Rajapaksa has provided, along with an effective political and military strategy and strong rapport with all sections of the public, it is possible to prevail against the most ruthless forces of terror. No one has a greater commitment to reconciliation in an all-inclusive spirit than our Government. Unhelpful external pressures that support narrow partisan interests could easily derail initiatives that have produced very substantial

results and peace on the ground, as we begin a new and exciting chapter in our country's history.

In the international community's quest to bring some semblance of equity to economic development across the continents, we must maintain increased focus on the continent of Africa, especially through South-South cooperation. Sri Lanka is vigorously expanding its engagement with the region, especially in matters relating to trade, investment, tourism and technical assistance.

All of our current endeavours should have a stronger focus on children and youth, who are the custodians of our future.

We have continuously supported resolution 66/6 and the need to end the unjust economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. Unilateral sanctions of that nature, which harm ordinary people, have no place in modern international intercourse.

Terrorism remains a scourge in the contemporary world, threatens our societies and impedes the socioeconomic progress of our people. As a country that has emerged from ruthless and brutal terrorism, Sri Lanka continues resolutely to support all multilateral efforts to enhance peace and security and eliminate all forms of terrorism, without discrimination. In our collective quest to eradicate terrorism, the selective application of principles and double standards must be scrupulously avoided. Terrorism from whatever source must be unequivocally condemned and countered.

It has been established that terrorism has developed close links with transnational organized crime in the form of cybercrime and identity theft, environment-related crime, maritime piracy, the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons and drugs. Maritime piracy has emerged as a major threat to international sea lanes and has added an additional economic burden to global trade. Sri Lanka, which has been a trading nation for centuries, eagerly supports multinational efforts to counter that threat. But it must be remembered that piracy originates on land and that any solution to piracy must also address its causes and developments on land.

The illicit transportation of migrants to greener pastures overseas by criminal networks requires our collective attention. Sri Lanka also continues to cooperate closely in that regard with our bilateral and multilateral partners. As a member of the Bali Process, we are committed to cooperation in capacity-building, the exchange of best practices and law enforcement cooperation. At the same time, we believe in the necessity to share information in good faith, acknowledging that action on the part of a variety of Member States, with their various national interests, is essential to counter the sophisticated human smuggling rings.

One long-standing issue that weighs on the conscience of the international community and which needs our sustained collective attention is the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka fully supports the implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions on Palestine, which will pave the way for the achievement of Statehood for the Palestinian people and bring lasting peace to the region. Sri Lanka fully supports Palestine in its efforts to achieve full membership in the United Nations.

Sri Lanka unreservedly condemns the defamation of all religions and religious leaders. While the right to free speech is fundamental to our value system, that right should not be abused in order to hurt the feelings of the faithful, whether they be Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jews or followers of other faiths. All available mechanisms must be employed to prevent the defamation of all religions and the exploitation of religious symbols for commercial purposes.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka is currently in the process of making arrangements to host the World Youth Conference in 2014. The primary objective will be the strengthening of youth inclusion in national decision-making processes in relation to the development and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. I cordially extend an open invitation to all fellow Member States to join hands with us to make that global event a success.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Minister for Foreign Affairs and La Francophonie of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is a happy coincidence — and one that gives me great pleasure — that my fellow countryman, who is presiding at this meeting, has given me the floor.

Despite progress in the field of knowledge and forecasting, the evolution of humankind remains subject to uncertainties. In that connection, the work

of the United Nations, which is the appropriate forum for seeking collective solutions to the many challenges that make up our world, is markedly affected by those uncertainties.

The persistence and resurgence of hotbeds of tension of all kinds pose a serious threat to peace and international security, jeopardize the implementation of all projects for sustainable development and pose a dangerous threat to the promotion and protection of human rights. In that context, it is appropriate that the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly has opened under the banner of the theme, "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". My delegation welcomes that choice, which is also in line with the theme of the previous session on mediation and reflects in a timely manner the concerns of the day and aspirations of our States.

A year ago, speaking from this rostrum, I asserted the importance and necessity of mediation as an essential tool for the prevention and settlement of conflicts, a tool that has proved itself, not only in Africa but around the world. Having endured the horrors of armed conflict for years in the 1990s, the Congo chose the path of mediation and dialogue. Thanks to that commitment, my country has been able to overcome the sociopolitical upheavals of its recent history, and today, the peace that reigns throughout the country has cleared the way for the impetus needed to strengthen our democratic process and economic development. Two rounds of legislative elections were conducted in an atmosphere of calm on 15 July and 5 August, followed by the peaceful celebration on 15 August of the fifty-second anniversary of our independence in Kinkala, city seat of the Department of Pool, which had endured violence for a long time; those events serve as additional examples of positive developments.

Strengthened by that experience, the Congo would like to voice its deep concern about the continuing crises threatening peace and security, regionally and internationally. For many years Africa has been the theatre of choice for conflict. Today a number of African countries — indeed, in some cases an entire region, like the Sahel — are still at the mercy of instability and increasingly complex crises. Several meetings dedicated to conflicts in Africa are listed on the agendas of high-level meetings during the General Assembly's current session, which is unquestionably an indicator of instability in the world. However, we can agree that the conflicts and crises that have marked the African continent for the whole of its post-independence history have also enriched it with the experience of mediation initiatives and have mobilized efforts aimed at settling the conflicts by peaceful means.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is dealing with a serious crisis in the eastern part of the country, characterized by repeated violence that has resulted in an intolerable humanitarian tragedy produced by small armed groups of the Mouvement du 23 mars and other opposition forces. That situation is a serious threat to peace and security and to the integrity and development of our brother country. Furthermore, the political, security, socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences can be felt throughout the Great Lakes region. The heads of State and Government of the region, meeting at the International Conference on the Great Lakes region, are fully committed to seeking peaceful solutions.

I would like to take this opportunity, as I did this morning, to commend again the initiative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to organize a high-level meeting on 27 September on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which will certainly provide a stimulus to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, supported by the African Union. The Congo, which is committed to that effort as a neighbour, a State member of the Conference and a member of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, concurs with the conclusions of that important meeting, hoping to see them realized as soon as possible, so as to enable the Democratic Republic of the Congo to regain its stability and play the role expected of that great country. Our region will continue with its efforts to achieve the objectives we have sought and will use every mechanism we have to attain them.

In December the Congo will host the thirty-fifth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which will allow us to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of that General Assembly body and continue our cooperation on settling crises in the subregion.

The collapse of democracy in Mali, which was once a fine example of democracy in Africa, represents a relapse that my country has condemned, while calling for a return to constitutional order. The deteriorating humanitarian situation, combined with the risk of

spreading terrorism, calls for urgent implementation of the decisions of the Economic Community of West African States, together with the support of the African Union, the United Nations and the international community, so as to ensure that that dangerous precedent is not repeated anywhere else and that any impulses towards destabilizing and partitioning States by terrorist groups are quashed.

My delegation can only welcome the positive developments in the political process established by the African Union in Somalia, which culminated in the election on 10 September of the new President of the Republic, Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Many challenges remain, of course, particularly those of security, unification and reconciliation and establishing the rule of law, to name only a few. In that regard, we must support Somalia by helping that country to strengthen the gains of recent months, focusing everything we do on working within a global strategy for the reconstruction and development of the entire Somali territory and maintaining a coordinated, organized and coherent approach on the part of the international community, in support of the efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Regarding the dispute between the young Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of the Sudan, my delegation urges both countries to demonstrate the necessary political will and to spare no effort to successfully and implement sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, as called for by the African Union in envisioning the existence of two viable States and a lasting peace. We support the African Union's negotiations in Ethiopia on that issue.

Outside the African continent, particularly with respect to the Middle East, the ongoing violence in certain countries continues to erode the prospects for peace in the region, not to mention the blocked peace process between Israel and Palestine, now deadlocked for several decades and, even worse, 10 years after the adoption of the Arab Peace Initiative. The Arab spring has apparently not bloomed there, to the detriment of the interests of a people who have the same right as any other to live in peace with its neighbours in a viable State. The Palestinian State has a rightful place in this body.

The situation in Syria is particularly troubling, as speakers before me have emphasized. Faced with the risks of the general destabilization that that situation presents for the subregion and the world, we call for a coordinated and negotiated settlement that takes into consideration the interests of the various parties, so as to put an end to the escalating violence and serious violations of human rights.

Regarding the nuclear issue, which represents a serious threat to humankind in general, it is essential that the nuclear-weapon States take responsibility, as they should, to implement specific measures that will enable progress towards genuine nuclear disarmament, while monitoring the ban on nuclear proliferation with regard to military purposes. We reaffirm the importance of respecting the three pillars of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, that is, nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the right of every State to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The development agenda of the United Nations is struggling to give sustainable support to our countries in their unceasing efforts to improve their economic development and their peoples' well-being. The commitments made by industrialized countries at the major international conferences under the auspices of the United Nations have still not been met. The global economic and financial crisis continues to weaken the economies of developed as well as developing countries around the world. We are also concerned about the ongoing crisis in the euro zone and its effects, which are having a considerable impact on the achievement of social development objectives at the international level, including the Millennium Development Goals. Areas such as the fight against poverty, employment, education and health are affected by the crisis. In that light, my delegation reaffirms the responsibility and central role of the United Nations in forging the spirit of solidarity and cooperation that can enable the commitments made in the areas of aid and financing of development to be respected.

Climate change remains a serious threat to the equilibrium of mankind. Sadly, we have to admit that we have not done enough to reverse its negative effects on the environment. It is therefore important to waste no more time and work to find solutions that will ensure a better future for coming generations.

Along those lines, my delegation took an active part in June at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), a high-level exchange on the challenge of sustainable development. The President

of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, brought Africa's voice to the Conference, in his role as spokesperson for the continent. While we welcome the analysis and the reaffirmation of shared positions that the Conference yielded, my delegation remains concerned about the lack of real progress on the important issues of an institutional framework for sustainable development and for global environmental governance, as well as plans for their implementation.

Although not all of Africa's concerns were addressed, Africa's common positions are nevertheless well represented in the Rio+20 final document (resolution 66/288, annex), thanks to the dogged perseverance and resolve of the African Group, which maintained unity and strove throughout the negotiation process to keep the African point of view in the fore. I want to take this opportunity here in New York to convey President Sassou Nguesso's words of appreciation to the African Group and to extend his special thanks to the group of experts led by Kenya and its Permanent Representative.

The sixty-seventh session of the Assembly is an important forum for a follow-up to Rio+20. I once again urge African delegates to speak with one voice in defending African interests in the vital matter of sustainable development. Especially important is the intergovernmental process for developing proposals for effective sustainable development financing strategies to mobilize resources and put them to effective use.

I could well have raised many other issues, such as Security Council reform and the need for genuine global governance that takes into account people's desire for multilateralism. But I will limit myself to a few words about certain concerns that should be taken into account. First is the need for global governance of political and security issues through the necessary reform of the Security Council. We also need to address global economic management by granting greater authority to the Economic and Social Council. Finally, there is the need for global environmental management through an international institution with real power to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

Our times demand the pursuit of those legitimate goals, shared by the majority of Member States of our world Organization. Its credibility and credit in the world will increase if we meet the challenge of global governance with a unified drive to create a more peaceful, prosperous and just world for the benefit of all.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Arvin Boolell, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr. Boolell (Mauritius): The world is living through unprecedented times. The challenges of an economic crisis now loom large. All nations, developed and developing, face growing uncertainties about their economic prospects. Serious concerns about the global economy arise now just after global prosperity had reached unprecedented heights. A second paradox is that the countries most seriously affected by the crisis are those that contributed the least to its root causes.

As fallout from the crisis threatens to produce ever more significant impacts, many already vulnerable small island States also face a major threat of a different nature. The threat is an existential one. As with the economic crisis, the countries that may be most severely affected by climate change are those that have contributed the least to the root causes of climate change. Many small island developing States thus face the dual threat of the impact of the worsening economies on their trading and their development partners and that of climate change.

Already vulnerable nations face greater threats at the international level, and more vulnerable groups face greater difficulties within nations. Young people are faced with higher levels of unemployment, and women and children are faced with reduced access to public services, health and education. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking at the latest Group of 20 meeting, put food and nutrition security at the top of the agenda. Meeting the energy needs for development is a major concern. Recent meetings convened by the Economic and Social Council have again highlighted other major concerns, including structural unemployment, rising inequality and the lag in poverty eradication.

Many countries, both developing and developed, face a major challenge with respect to youth unemployment. Improving access to education and tackling the mismatch between qualifications and employment are now a top policy goal. The world cannot let its young people down and must give them an opportunity to contribute to economic recovery and prosperity. What we do for young people and what they

can do for the world they will inherit will shape the economic future of our world.

As all nations work to promote sustainable development, essential components of governance required to achieve that goal include more equitable and inclusive growth, the fight against corruption, greater accountability, more transparency and a general culture of integrity. Mauritius affirms that along with initiatives to revisit development objectives, reform of the international financial architecture and global economic governance must remain a top priority. Mauritius strongly supports the view that the present economic crisis is of a global nature and that solutions for inclusive green growth also need to be global in nature.

The inconclusive talks of the Doha Round and those on the United Nations Climate Change Convention both suffered from a historical divide that regrettably resurfaces from time to time and is resurfacing now at a time when global solutions are more than ever necessary. The debate over good economic and fiscal governance at the national level will always remain valid and necessary but, however sound such domestic policies may be, the global environment will have an impact on growth and development, especially on that of developing countries and smaller economies.

Thirty-two years ago, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues highlighted, in the 1980 Brandt report, the interdependence of developing and developed economies and the mutuality of their interests. The report explained how all nations would benefit from a strengthened global economy. As the world faces another crisis, all nations should recall how much interdependence has grown since the Brandt report and bear in mind the interconnection and mutuality of interests in the development agenda.

In that context, nations must resist protectionist measures as an easy way out. They would definitely be detrimental in the medium and long term. The Committee for Development Policy, in its July 2012 report (E/2012/33), called for a Transformative Development Agenda. The international community must pledge its support for a transformative agenda based on the recognition that globally coordinated solutions are necessary to accompany sound domestic policies. It is imperative that the General Assembly, with its pre-eminent and universal membership, play a crucial role in the debate on globally coordinated solutions.

We reaffirm our support for a revitalized Economic and Social Council, which should be able to exercise the effective role and function attributed to it by the Charter. In that context, we also welcome the reaffirmation of the mandate of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at Doha. UNCTAD must continue to serve as the focal point of the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development and the interrelated issues of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development.

As the world engages in the current debate on global solutions, we must promote more economic exchanges among developing nations. Regional integration and cooperation are key to future development. Trade and investment must also be accompanied by greater regional cooperation through the pooling of resources and the provision of public goods. Pooling entails increased economies of scale and makes it less costly to acquire technology.

One area where regional cooperation can make a significant contribution is the energy sector. Pooling resources and coordinating policies at the regional level and among groups of developing countries with common requirements can facilitate the development of technology and the implementation of renewable energies.

As we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, let us remind ourselves of the potential of the oceans as an engine for growth and promote international cooperation in a vast collective effort to tap that potential. There is potential there with respect not only to food and mineral resources but also to transport, leisure and the advancement of science.

We welcome the reaffirmation by world leaders in Rio de Janeiro that small island developing States remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities. We expect that the commitment to take urgent and concrete action to address the vulnerabilities of small island developing States will be followed by concrete actions. It is imperative that small island developing States issues be more effectively mainstreamed throughout the entire United Nations system and that a dedicated and clearly identified focal point be set up within every United Nations entity dealing with small island

developing States issues. The Small Island Developing States Unit within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should be strengthened to enable it to provide coordinated support for small island developing States.

Mauritius joins other world leaders who have called on all countries to deliver on their assistance commitments. The international community cannot spend so much capital on negotiating new pledges and undertakings in a whole array of outcome documents and then ignore what has been agreed. We can move forward only if past commitments are honoured.

We welcome the proposed establishment of a sustainable development council to follow up on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and formulate sustainable development goals. We also welcome the appointment of a high-level panel on the post-2015 development agenda. Those entities and others should be able to build on what has already been agreed through global negotiations.

I must say that our hearts go out to the people of Syria, who are enduring the consequences of a severe humanitarian crisis, as there is no prospect in sight of a resolution to the political struggle. The international community cannot remain indifferent to such suffering. The world can also not remain indifferent to the suffering of the Palestinian people, who are without a universally recognized State and face severe economic hardships and insecurity. Those challenges will test the credibility and moral authority of the international system.

I must also say that, while we have the utmost respect for all faiths and religions, we strongly believe that there is no justification for violence, however profound the outrage in response to religious vilification. We also support the fundamental principle of the protection of diplomats and diplomatic premises, which is at the core of the interaction between nations, and we call on all members of the comity of nations to fully respect that principle.

We also call on the international community to support the full implementation of the road map worked out in our neighbouring State of Madagascar and to provide the transitional Government with the means to ensure a speedy return to constitutional rule and democracy in that great country.

Mauritius very much welcomed the High-level Meeting of the Assembly on the rule of law. Development and greater economic prosperity go hand in hand with enhanced rule of law at both the national and the international levels. There will be no meaningful rule of law at the international level unless and until all nations, especially the small ones, have avenues for resolving their disputes with other States.

The United Kingdom excised part of Mauritian territory prior to independence, has refused to enter into talks in good faith on that dispute and has ensured that the dispute cannot be resolved by the International Court of Justice. Thus, the decolonization of Africa has not been completed. At a time when the United Nations debates the rule of law at both the national and the international levels, we urge the international community to work on machinery that would enable States, whatever their size or economic power, to have at their disposal judicial and other peaceful means of resolving disputes. The rule of law at the international level cannot be normative only. There must also be adequate enforcement mechanisms, without which there is no meaningful rule of law. The full realization of the territorial integrity of Mauritius also requires a settlement that would enable us to effectively assert our sovereignty over Tromelin Island. We look forward to continued dialogue with France in a spirit of mutual cooperation.

(*spoke in French*)

The challenges that our countries currently face call for exemplary solidarity on the part of the community of nations. Our common interests must guide all of our actions. We will not be able to pull through without each other. All Governments, civil society, researchers and entrepreneurs must therefore be aware of the interdependence of our economies and work together for the good of all nations. Countries often turn inwards in times of crisis and look out only for what they believe to be their own interests. However, true solutions are collective. A global recovery would serve the interests of all States.

(*spoke in English*)

Before I end, let me convey to the Assembly the greetings of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and its people.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Enrique Castillo,

Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castillo (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will begin my remarks by congratulating Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly, on his election. My country offers its support to him as he fulfils his important role. Success in his work will also represent success for the United Nations and therefore for all the peoples of the world. We endorse his commitment to the "adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", and we support the road map that he has outlined for the exercise of his duties. We welcome the outstanding work of his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and emphasize in particular his commitment to mediation. We reiterate our support for the five imperatives of the agenda presented in January by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his second term.

Barely a year ago, we gathered in this Hall, encouraged by an echo of hope. It came from North Africa and the Middle East and was broadcast by a wide cross-section of voices gathered around one universal value — freedom. That hopeful clamour can still be heard in the complex transitions to democracy, propelled by the will of the people. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are the best examples. We convey our admiration and respect to those countries and their people.

Today, however, the sounds most strongly resonating in this Hall are the desperate cries of women and children in Syria. To them, we convey our solidarity. At the same time, we are distressed at the fury unleashed by those who would manipulate intolerance and extremism. We are worried by the resurgence of territorial conflicts, the warmongering rhetoric of some States and the indifference of autocratic regimes. We face the ongoing challenges of relentless terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. Meanwhile, alarming signs of environmental destruction are cropping up with increasing urgency. These challenges have made us aware of the many threats we face, and they reiterate the seminal importance of this Organization and of the multilateral system as a whole.

The peaceful settlement of disputes is imperative for peaceful coexistence among individuals, peoples and countries. For Costa Rica, it is also a part of daily life and a central goal of our foreign policy. It is a value that is deeply rooted in our respect for diversity and our commitment to tolerance and the rule of law. To prevent conflicts or to strip them of their violent consequences, we must promote preventive diplomacy and mediation. We enjoy the best results when these processes generate legally binding agreements and decisions within the framework of the rule of law. A clear link therefore exists between the theme proposed by President Jeremić for this session and the commitment by the United Nations and its Member States to the rule of law.

Costa Rica believes in the power of mediation, and is thus part of a group of countries dedicated to promoting it within the United Nations. In July 2011, thanks to an initiative by the group that was enthusiastically supported by many other States, the Assembly adopted by consensus its first resolution aimed at strengthening the role of mediation (resolution 66/291). A few days ago, the Assembly gave its support to a follow-up text.

Moreover, Costa Rica is proud to have headed up one of the most successful mediation processes in the history of our hemisphere. In the mid-1980s, various armed conflicts bloodied our brotherly countries in Central America. There seemed to be no way out of the conflict. However, thanks to the tenacious leadership of former Costa Rican President Óscar Arias Sánchez, on 7 August 1987, the region's Heads of State signed the Central American peace plan in Guatemala. That leadership earned our compatriot and President the Nobel Peace Prize.

The success of the peace plan stemmed from the double commitment of the signatories: to cease hostilities, and to address their root causes. Thanks to this comprehensive approach, the vision of the five Presidents of the Central American isthmus and effective international support, Central America silenced its guns and achieved peace. It was a peace founded on democracy and the commitment to development and justice.

Unfortunately, the region today faces another challenge of similar proportions. I refer to the onslaught of drug trafficking and international organized crime. We are a transit route between the production centres of the south and the large consumption centre of the north. This situation has made us the victims of a problem over which we exercise minimal control. Our resources to deal with the problem are even more meagre. Central Americans countries have agreed on regional strategies to work jointly on prevention, interdiction and suppression, but our capacity for action is limited and has prevented any rapid implementation.

Despite all this, Costa Rica has rejected the dangerous notion of a "war" to confront these scourges. Rather, we are working to expand opportunities for young people, promote preventative measures, improve police capacity, strengthen the effectiveness of the judiciary and assist addicts. Fortunately, we are seeing results in terms of civil security. For example, our murder rate, which is the lowest in Central America, has fallen from 11.7 per 100,000 people in May 2011, to 9 per 100,000 in May of this year. Reports of crime in general decreased by 12 per cent from 2010 to 2011. However, the cartels' onslaught is so intense, the logic of the drug market so disastrous, and the global strategies to control it so disorganized and insufficient that the outlook is grim.

Costa Rica therefore believes a more active link must be developed between the United Nations and the design and implementation of balanced regional strategies to deal with the drug trade. Moreover, drug traffickers must be viewed as a real threat to peace and international security.

Costa Rica is a small, democratic, unarmed and civilian country. The multilateral system and international law are our only means of defence. For this reason, we have recognized the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice since 1973.

At the end of 2010, we appealed to the Court after the Government of Nicaragua illegally deployed military forces and civilian personnel in part of our national territory. In March of the following year, the Court pronounced a series of provisional measures. Among them, the Court ordered Nicaragua to remove its forces from the disputed area and granted environmental custody to Costa Rica. However, the Government of Nicaragua has consistently flouted the order and continued to send personnel to that area. It has done so in open defiance of the Court, to the detriment of our bilateral relations, and in violation of paragraph 31 of the Declaration on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels that was adopted a week ago by the Assembly (resolution 67/1). We do not want this case to mar relations or, even worse, the profound human ties between our countries. But Nicaragua has still failed to fulfil the provisional measures of the Court. We regret this, we condemn this and we denounce this once again in this Hall.

Despite its clear adherence to the rule of law and commitment to mediation, the international community has been unable to adopt a key instrument for avoiding conflicts or, at least, limiting their destructive effects. At the end of July 2012, we failed to reach a consensus on a universal, robust and binding arms trade treaty. It was a sombre moment for peace and human dignity. Costa Rica, one of the co-authors of that initiative, will not cease in its efforts to promote the kind of instrument that the millions of victims of conventional weapons are demanding from the silence of their tombs.

The rule of law should also be the foundation of global governance. If this governance is to be robust in any area, it should be in the area of the environment. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development brought about important progress in this respect. However, the biggest tasks and commitments remain pending. While the global temperature continues to rise, droughts and floods continue to exact a toll in lives, destroy infrastructure and displace populations. The environmental threat is about to assume exponential dimensions. We cannot wait any longer to act.

Costa Rica adopted sustainability as a development model several years ago and has embraced its national responsibilities on the matter. We have increased our forest coverage. We generate 90 per cent of our energy from renewable sources. Over 25 per cent of our territory is made up of national parks, and we have adopted the goal of becoming a carbon-neutral country by 2021. But these and many other initiatives by small countries will be useless without the commitment of the biggest carbon emitters and without international cooperation for mitigation and adaption in the most vulnerable countries.

The formulation of the post-2015 sustainable development goals gives us an excellent opportunity to move forward. We expect their formulation to be a multisectoral and participatory process that includes rule of law and good governance components.

Middle-income countries still need the support of the international community to consolidate our improvements in economic and human development. Let us not forget that our achievements are due, in part, to the proper use of cooperation mechanisms. To eliminate these because they have been well used would be a disastrous mistake. That is why Costa Rica, together with other middle-income countries, will continue to participate actively in improving the methodology guiding the graduation processes in the context of the United Nations Development Programme. As we mentioned, we must consider, in the models for

these processes, not only income, but also other criteria that better reflect the extent of our challenges and that foster cooperation strategies that provide greater support to our development efforts.

The main leadership role in global governance should be played by the United Nations, on the basis of international law. Only legitimate multilateral action can promote and protect the most important global public goods. We cannot discount the external challenges to the leadership of this Organization. But it is more important that we recognize the internal need to commit ourselves to making it more vigorous, effective, efficient, inclusive and representative. Member States should understand that the best way to promote our national interests through the United Nations is to reform it in order to improve its performance.

Costa Rica aligns itself with the concept of a global Secretariat that was formulated by the Secretary-General, and is ready to give its constructive support to translating this idea into reality. We are also committed to the comprehensive reform of the Security Council and believe that improving its working methods should be an ongoing process.

We emphasize the value of the responsibility to protect as a critical operative principle of the international community.

The fight against impunity is part of the fight for human dignity. This is why we ardently support the International Criminal Court, one of the most relevant achievements of the multilateral system since the creation of the United Nations.

The upheavals in the world today demand our attention and fill us with dismay, but hope also flourishes alongside them. What better example is there, in this regard, than the spirit recently embodied by the Olympic and Paralympic athletes in London, who competed with clear rules, fair play, mutual respect and a feeling of achievement? If the conflicts of our world mimicked that experience, the course of humanity would be different. Maybe such a fundamental change is not possible, but we should at least continue to work for a world that is more just, peaceful, free, sustainable, and respectful of human dignity and the rule of law. Costa Rica reiterates its profound commitment to this task.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Elliot Ohin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Togolese Republic.

Mr. Ohin (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to address my warmest congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on the confidence that the entire United Nations family has invested in him by electing him to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate Togo's support to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for all of the work that he continues to undertake in order to promote peace in the world. We appreciate the immense efforts that he is pursuing in Africa and many other regions of the world in order to find a peaceful outcome to the conflicts that they face by prioritizing dialogue, mediation and cooperation.

The choice of the peaceful settlement of disputes as the central theme of this session is a wise choice, and I welcome it. Indeed, it allows us, in the complex world we live in today, to reconnect with the original purpose and founding values of the United Nations. Over the decades, our Organization has taken it upon itself to respond to the many challenges posed by a world that is constantly changing. It remains present and active in all the areas that present opportunities for progress by humankind.

However, in spite of our efforts and the progress that has been achieved, here and there, in the areas of technology, economy and social issues, we note, unfortunately, that force continues to be used all too frequently in international relations. On many occasions, recourse to the use of armed force has been chosen before all avenues for the peaceful means of dispute resolution have been exhausted.

The African continent, unfortunately, has paid and continues to pay a heavy price when it seeks to save time by prematurely cutting short the process for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Yet, experience has shown that even in the rare cases where recourse to the use of weapons has allowed one of the parties to the conflict to quickly prevail over the other, lasting peace and stability have not been achieved.

That is why my country, Togo, welcomes the fact that the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly gives all of us the opportunity to revisit the original values of the United Nations Charter in order to better guide our work in dealing with the challenges of our contemporary world. Indeed, perhaps it is time to put dialogue among nations at the centre of the international agenda again. But today we need to go further, and also

make dialogue within nations an important component of our efforts to achieve peace. Dialogue within nations is in fact an indispensable corollary of dialogue among nations. It should be encouraged and cultivated in the same vein, because it is the prelude to preserving peace among nations.

Indeed, since the contemporary world is marked by interdependence, when misunderstandings degenerate into internal conflicts because there is no dialogue, it is rare that they do not have repercussions in neighbouring countries. The Syrian crisis and the climate of growing insecurity in the Sahel-Sahara region are textbook examples.

That is why I would like to urge our common Organization and its Member States to persevere in the efforts already under way to make dialogue within nations a cornerstone of their conflict-prevention work in the world. Before all else, encouraging dialogue within nations comes down to adopting a constructive approach that strives to promote universal values while taking into account the realities specific to each country, as well as local and regional specificities. It is also a matter of making citizens, whatever country they live in, responsible through various means for the culture of peace, for listening to one another and for a sense of compromise in order to make dialogue a cross-cutting value in our modern societies.

With that in mind, the West African Economic and Monetary Union — over which Togo is honoured to preside and which now enjoys observer status in the General Assembly — decided at its May 2012 meeting in Lomé to give higher priority to matters of peace and security than to purely economic issues. That novel move by a regional economic organization is fundamentally guided by the desire to make dialogue a priority tool for conflict prevention.

In that regard, I remain profoundly convinced that decentralization of conflict prevention and resolution that makes use of the contribution of subregional organizations is one of the most viable options for peacekeeping in the world. The proximity of such bodies to the geographic areas of conflict and to their historical and cultural roots is a major asset that should be maximized in conflict prevention and the settlement of disputes.

Still, the increased responsibility of subregional organizations should not be a pretext to justify a kind of disguised renunciation of our collective responsibility in the area of promoting peace and security in the world. As Members of the United Nations, we do not have that choice, because the community of values that unites us is a permanent call to promote solidarity and even complementarity between the specific goals of subregional organizations and the search for universality that is the very foundation of the United Nations.

On that point, it should be noted that the protocol establishing a Peace and Security Council in the African Union in 2002 created a great deal of hope at the time. Modelled on the Security Council of the United Nations, that new institutional tool was intended to enable the African Union to intervene directly in countries in crisis. Sadly, recent experiences, whether in Libya or Côte d'Ivoire, have shown that, faced with the antagonisms that characterize the international community, that tool has not been able to fulfil our expectations. Those modest beginnings confirm the urgent need for close cooperation between regional peacekeeping mechanisms and the system established decades ago by the United Nations to ensure collective international security.

From that point of view, I would like to join my voice to those of previous speakers to invite the entire international community to assist all the institutional players who are proceeding with good will to help Mali in its determination to recover its territorial integrity as quickly as possible and to help that country re-establish peace so that the transition period can be successful.

That obligation of solidarity is a call to all of us. Recent events in the north of the African continent have once again exposed the sad reality that the reduction of tension and the prevention and settlement of internal disputes all too often involve elements that extend well beyond individual States.

Drawing on its experience of the past two decades, which were marked by major political shocks, and honoured to sit as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Togo resolutely joins the dynamic of the continuing search for peace focusing on dialogue and cooperation. In that regard, on behalf of my compatriots, and from this high rostrum, I would like to salute the United Nations, other international organizations and all friendly nations and partners of goodwill who recently helped the Togolese people set out on the path of dialogue to overcome the weight of the past. That wise choice enabled us to embark on the

construction of a new country, one reconciled with itself and facing out onto the world.

Our feeling of gratitude is all the more profound because we have been able to see in just a few years the economic and social progress that the Togolese people can achieve on their own, now that they are living in peace and harmony among themselves, with their neighbours and with the rest of the world. We have renewed our economic growth and are intensifying our efforts to ensure better political and economic governance through sweeping institutional and constitutional reforms. We intend to implement them out of respect for the republican agenda.

From one year to the next, public freedoms have taken root in Togo. Political pluralism, which is deeply ingrained in Togolese customs, has a natural ally in the acknowledged right of all citizens to demonstrate in complete freedom, so long as they respect prevailing rules.

The challenge in Togo today is to consolidate economic recovery, to promote a firm foundation for democracy and the rule of law, and to promote the indivisibility of human rights in order to propel the country towards new gains, particularly in the social arena, where expectations are both numerous and urgent. Of course, the progress made in recent years in the economic, political and social realms is still fragile. That is why the Government remains alert to the different views expressed on the best ways to consolidate that progress. We have opted to make the search for consensus a central axis for managing the affairs of State.

In that same spirit, the Togolese Government is working to build on the excitement that has gripped the country's political class on the eve of legislative elections. Now that dialogue has been reopened, I have good reason to hope that it will lead to broader membership in that class so that its conclusions will be accepted by all. Our immediate priority is to hold successful, free, peaceful and transparent legislative elections. Indeed, we aim to raise Togo to the ranks of those countries that have managed to eradicate the syndrome of violence before, during and after elections. Nonetheless, we must recognize that such violence has unfortunately turned elections into a cause of mortality in various regions of the world.

That scourge has caused so much damage on the African continent, in both the loss of human lives and in material destruction, that it is urgent to do everything to prevent its reappearance in Togo or elsewhere. That is both an individual and a collective responsibility. We should leave no stone unturned in the struggle that has been launched at all levels to prevent the elections from being synonymous with violence and chaos.

Civil society has an important role to play in that crucial area. States must help civil society to better organize itself in order to play its full role and to become a type of citizens' watch that can truly contribute to the evolution of human societies. However, in return, those organizations must demonstrate their probity and lack of bias. They must also refrain from aligning themselves with belligerent factions or fighting for the cause of the protagonists in political battles. Civil society must not be a Trojan horse for political groups.

Mr. Charles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Because of their proximity to citizens, the organizations of civil society must free themselves from political cliques so as to contribute to the rapid development of human societies in key areas of economic and social life. In that regard, I welcome the decision taken several years ago to encourage citizen action by accrediting to the Economic and Social Council those organizations that have been recognized for their usefulness. That is a judicious way to encourage, within those citizen organizations, a heightened awareness of their responsibilities when facing today's major challenges, economic crises, environment crises and the aspirations to democracy and freedoms that, although they assume new forms, should not obstruct the momentum of our societies.

The peoples' fight for more open and democratic societies should not dissipate at the borders of nation States. That fight must extend to the international level, in which the rules of the game must also continue to evolve in order to take into account the major changes that have taken place since the creation of the United Nations. And yet, since 1945, the basic rules that govern the functioning of the Security Council have literally been frozen in an immobility that is increasingly appalling. It is obvious that maintenance of the status quo in a context of profound change cannot fail to generate serious dysfunctions. The Council's incapacity to agree on certain major cases of great importance is a perfect illustration, and again sharply raises the question of reform of that body, which is at the heart of

the entire United Nations system. That process, which has countless times been broached and put off for later, today deserves full and immediate attention.

Thus, Togo would like to solemnly reaffirm its steadfast support for the African Union initiative that seeks to grant the African continent, following the modalities that have not yet been defined, more adequate representation within the United Nations Security Council. I firmly believe that it is up to the nations that have always had the privilege of having a permanent seat on the Council to take a small step that would allow all of humankind to make a giant leap forward. That gesture seems essential to me because it is a sine qua non for generating a new dynamic that would allow us to collectively deliver more coordinated, bolder and determined responses and to thus forge a global governance that is more mature and more free, with greater analytical capacity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Winston Dookeran, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Dookeran (Trinidad and Tobago): Her Excellency Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on whose behalf I speak, extends her congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. The honourable Prime Minister has also asked me to convey to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Trinidad and Tobago's appreciation for his untiring efforts in working towards peace and security in today's world.

I am privileged to address this Hall at a time when the world is faced with turmoil and uncertainty. Today, the world is radically different from what it was a year ago. The redistribution of wealth and the very nature of global power are shifting. New dynamics are emerging as we witness the growing economies in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The global pattern of distribution of resources is being transformed by new discoveries and by changes in technological processes and in information. The world map of financial flows has changed, forcing us to look with more scrutiny on the economic forces surrounding us and the threat they pose to financial sustainability.

It is in this context that Trinidad and Tobago endorses the President's statement at the opening of the Assembly's sixty-seventh session on 25 September:

> "A growing number of States are determined to enhance their external engagement, aspiring to play greater roles in their respective regions and beyond. As a result, power and influence in the international arena are becoming more diffuse". (*A/67/PV.6, p. 4*)

When Trinidad and Tobago mounted this rostrum for the first time 50 years ago, our Permanent Representative Sir Ellis Clarke, an illustrious legal scholar, remarked:

> "We recognize the responsibility which we have assumed with membership in this Organization. That responsibility we can neither shirk nor delegate." (*A/PV.1122, para. 126*)

Today, I stand in reconfirmation of that responsibility. In these decades of engagement, we are always anchored by the three main pillars on which the United Nations was founded: peace and security, human rights and development.

At the core of our commitment has been the rule of law both within and beyond our borders, which is the basis of the theme set for this year's debate: "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", which reaffirms a core principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Too often we have witnessed the severity of the consequences when States act unilaterally to solve disputes through the illegal use of force. Trinidad and Tobago calls on all nation States to ratify the amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on the crime of aggression. We expect to ratify those amendments by the next Assembly of States Parties. The entry into force of those amendments will fill a crucial gap by making it possible to bring to justice those criminally responsible for the commission of the crime of aggression.

In the light of recent troubling developments, Trinidad and Tobago is compelled to reaffirm the provisions of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The Convention requires States to protect the premises of diplomatic missions and ensure the safety of diplomatic personnel. Those sacred principles must be upheld even in times of armed conflict and armed violence.

The United Nations is the principal vehicle for facilitating the settlement of disputes or situations

among States by peaceful means. The architecture is in place to achieve that objective. However, it needs to be strengthened. To achieve that noble goal, the political commitment of Member States, whether large or small, developed or developing, is absolutely necessary.

Member States must move swiftly to restructure the Security Council. For Trinidad and Tobago, the status quo is unacceptable. The Council must be reformed to reflect the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. The legitimacy of that body can be reaffirmed only if the new dynamics of global power are reflected in its composition and operation.

It is a matter of grave concern to Trinidad and Tobago that the Security Council has not been able to effectively address the situation in Syria. We appeal to the Council to fully support the work of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative for Syria of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. The Council must uphold its sacred Charter mandate and ensure that all sides involved in that conflict are made to account for their actions, which have caused tremendous human suffering and continue to threaten international peace and security.

At the same time, we also call for more principled leadership by the permanent members of the Council to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the adoption of numerous resolutions by the General Assembly and the Council, and several peace initiatives, including that of the League of Arab States, we continue to witness, almost on a daily basis, wanton violence and tremendous loss of life, resulting in further escalation of tensions. A resolution of the conflict remains elusive, and the conflict is a catalyst for regional insecurity and instability. That makes even more urgent the need to find a formula for enduring peace. The United Nations must commit all available resources to mediating a two-State agreement in order to begin to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian situation, in full accordance with resolutions reaffirming borders existing before 1967.

I will now address other issues relating to the global development agenda.

The completion of Cuba's reintegration as a full and equal partner in the international system is an issue close to the Caribbean. Over the years, that policy objective has been given practical content through the establishment of a wide-ranging dialogue and in specific cooperation agreements in a variety of development sectors of interest to the Caribbean, as part of the Caribbean convergence initiative. In the view of Trinidad and Tobago, the imperative of the initiative compels us to regard the economic blockade of Cuba as an anachronism. We therefore call yet again for its removal.

We are only three years away from the deadline set by world leaders for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While Trinidad and Tobago would have preferred a more equitable geographical distribution on the Secretary-General's panel on the acceleration of efforts to achieve targets set by the MDGs, we nevertheless welcome its establishment. We also call for fresh and bold changes and a paradigm shift in thinking in the design of the post-2015 development agenda.

We must safeguard the environment for future generations and in that regard move decisively to fully implement our obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. That would guarantee the survival of those of us who are most vulnerable to climate change, climate variability and sea-level rise. Every moment of delay takes us closer to our own demise.

The health and well-being of our people is central to our development. The prevalence of non-communicable diseases, in particular, poses a serious threat to Caribbean development. Trinidad and Tobago laments the lack of action on the Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases adopted one year ago (resolution 66/2, annex). We cannot risk further inaction on the matter. The adverse consequences are significant. We therefore urge that the matter be given high priority on the international development agenda.

The stability of many regions is being undermined by the illicit trade in conventional weapons, which has fuelled armed conflict and armed violence. Trinidad and Tobago is encouraged by the support of many countries for the conclusion of a robust and legally binding arms trade treaty. However, we deeply regret the failure of the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty, despite the support of an overwhelming majority. That reflects the refusal of a few States to agree to an instrument that would prevent the diversion of arms to the illegal market. Illegal weapons, including small arms and light weapons, in the hands of terrorists, drug dealers, gang leaders and other actors involved in transnational organized crimes, are an affront to

the efforts undertaken to resolve disputes by peaceful means. In the Caribbean, and I daresay elsewhere, the high incidence of gun-related crimes is intolerable. We join with our Caribbean Community partners and others in the call for the resumption of negotiations on the arms trade treaty by the first quarter of 2013.

We also recognize the important role of women as agents of change — not as mere victims — in all initiatives related to the resolution of disputes and conflicts. Trinidad and Tobago was privileged to host a high-level discussion with representatives of other Member States, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the non-governmental organization community at the margins of the General Assembly last week on the topic of women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. The high point of the discussion was the signing of a joint statement by Government representatives to promote the equitable representation of women in all decision-making on the matter. Trinidad and Tobago requests all Member States to support this draft resolution when it comes before the General Assembly later in the session.

The majority of States settle disputes by peaceful means. We take this opportunity to applaud the special agreement signed by the Governments of Belize and Guatemala to submit their long-standing border dispute to the International Court of Justice for adjudication.

We in Trinidad and Tobago have delimited our maritime boundaries through bilateral negotiations and arbitration, in keeping with the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This conduct has not only promoted good-neighbourliness among States in the region, but also provided an environment conducive to the exploration and exploitation of living and non-living marine resources so vital to the social and economic development of our people.

In this increasingly multipolar world, where interconnectivity is crucial, small States are faced with mounting challenges to find a space and a place in the new world order. Trinidad and Tobago has promoted in every forum the need for constructive dialogue between small States, the Group of 20, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and the international financial institutions.

Trinidad and Tobago recognizes this call for a new diplomacy, and we therefore join with Mrs. Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica, in calling on the major international lending agencies to recognize the special circumstances of middle-income countries and not push them to the margins of the development agenda.

We must advance the global economic governance agenda. To this end, middle-income and small nations must not be excluded from development cooperation and financing on the basis of per capita income alone.

As we look forward to the next 50 years of membership of the United Nations, Trinidad and Tobago has a renewed optimism. In spite of the hurdles of the past, we are witnessing a new vitality in the United Nations today, and we reiterate our advocacy for a new dialogue and a new diplomacy. The international community is once again embracing multilateralism with higher expectations. The ongoing development of new rules and new norms in human rights; trade and development; protection of the environment; and peace and security gives hope that the human tragedies which bedevilled the twentieth century can be avoided. A new leadership with a global mindset must engage the various communities of interests to find more durable solutions in a volatile global environment. This new international leadership must find the right mix of power, politics and economics to achieve the necessary performance level for sustainable regional and global economic growth, and ultimately development, that will benefit the citizens of all nations.

Trinidad and Tobago will engage regional, hemispheric and global partners to assist the United Nations in making the world a safer and better place for all humankind. But let me conclude by reminding us all that we do not have the luxury of time. The eyes of the world are upon us. Our actions today must allow tomorrow's generations to experience a better and more secure future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins, Chairman of the delegation of Angola.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese: interpretation provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Angola, I avail myself of this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session and to assure him of the support of my country in the fulfilment of his mission. It is our belief that under his leadership this session will confirm the importance and role of the

General Assembly in finding solutions to the burning issues affecting humankind, thereby helping to make the world safer and fairer. I would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for the exemplary and wise manner in which he conducted the work of the Assembly at its previous session. I further salute Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the dynamism he has invested in the work of our Organization. In this connection, I would like to thank him for his visit to my country in February of this year, during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the advent of peace in Angola. During that visit, he had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the progress made in the reconstruction of the country and consolidation of democratic institutions.

This session of the General Assembly is taking place at a time of profound international political, economic and social transformations, which reaffirm the relevance of the central theme of our discussion: maintaining international peace and security, eradicating poverty, promoting development, protecting the environment and ensuring a better future for generations to come, guaranteeing the rule of law in international relations, and promoting and ensuring the protection of human rights. These are indeed the main challenges facing us today.

In addition to these, there are further challenges requiring priority attention from our Organization, including disarmament, the fight against organized crime, the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and the persistence of armed conflicts and their impact on people's lives. Having had the painful experience of war, which still has major consequences for the lives of our people, Angola reiterates that dialogue and negotiation are the way to a peaceful resolution of conflict. Angola will continue to meet its obligations and fulfil its responsibilities at the international level, in particular with regard to Africa as a whole, as well as in the context of the regional economic and political groups to which it belongs, including the Southern African Development Community, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region.

The international economic and financial crisis that is affecting all countries in the world continues to demand solutions, including the reform of the economic, financial and international trade system in order to serve the interests of all countries in a global perspective. In this regard, my Government reiterates its support for initiatives aimed at liberalizing international trade in line with the Doha Round. The reform of the international economic and financial system's regulatory institutions is of crucial importance to ensure greater flexibility and transparency in allocating capital to the least developed countries — a category that includes the majority of African nations.

It is also essential to take appropriate measures towards strengthened support for international action on sustainable development and increased financial contributions to the United Nations to enable our Organization to fulfil its mandate efficiently. It must do so by renewing its commitments to the sustainable development issues contained in Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development provided a solid framework for creating national and international policies to ensure the social, economic and environmental welfare of our peoples.

We note that despite the progress made, there is a continued need for the international community to translate commitments into action in order to achieve sustainable development. Africa in general, and my country in particular, believe that intensive efforts on the part of the international community are needed to tackle the phenomena that threaten to reverse progress made with respect to development. Drought and desertification, climate change, natural disasters, loss of biodiversity and rapid urbanization are just some of the factors that adversely affect development efforts worldwide.

The Security Council plays a key role in preventing and resolving conflicts, and in peacekeeping efforts, in accordance with the powers conferred upon it by the Charter of the United Nations. The central theme at the heart of our debate calls for reform of the Security Council, as well as ensuring the fair representation of all regions and the broadening of its permanent membership in order to adapt it to contemporary reality.

Allow me to refer to a set of conflicts that are of critical concern to my country. In the Great Lakes region, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to worry the international community. My country reaffirms its support for the decisions of the third extraordinary summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in

Kampala, as well as the efforts of the African Union and the Southern African Development Community.

Angola welcomes the normalization of the legal and constitutional order in Somalia as a result of the completion of the transition process, including the inauguration of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Given that the situation remains unstable, Angola urges the international community to continue to support the stabilization process in that country.

The situation in the Sudan has seen positive developments. Angola welcomes the recent agreements between the sisterly Republics of South Sudan and the Sudan, with a view to the settling of their disputes. Angola urges stakeholders to engage with one another and to show the political will necessary to implement the commitments undertaken.

With respect to Mali, Angola deplores the worsening humanitarian situation resulting from the crisis prevailing in that country. Angola calls upon the international community to demonstrate its determination to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali.

In the sisterly nation of Guinea-Bissau, we advocate a comprehensive solution and the permanent normalization of the constitutional order, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the Economic Community of West African States, as well as the wishes of all the internal actors, in order to stabilize the country and establish peace.

We remain concerned about the lack of progress in resolving the issue of Western Sahara. We call on the parties involved to continue negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations so that the people of Western Sahara can exercise their right of self-determination.

The prevailing situation in the Middle East in general, and the Palestinian territories in particular, is one of the most serious problems facing the international community. Angola supports the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security and within secure internationally recognized borders, in line with the position of the international community.

The conflict in Syria poses a grave threat to international peace and security and will seriously exacerbate the humanitarian situation in the region. Angola urges the international community to support the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The embargo imposed on Cuba violates international law and for decades has been a major impediment to that country's development and improvements in the lives of its citizens. Angola reiterates its principled position affirming the need to end the embargo in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Angola's foreign policy will continue to be based on mutual respect, mutual benefit, good-neighbourliness and the strengthening of regional economic integration. Angola will continue to comply with all the international commitments and international instruments to which it is a party.

Ten years after achieving peace, Angola has recorded significant progress in consolidating its democratic process. General elections were held on 31 August in a civil and peaceful atmosphere, thus demonstrating the maturity of its people. The results expressed the sovereign will of the Angolan people, as verified by international observers who closely followed the election.

Currently, Angola is joyfully celebrating the investiture of its organs of State sovereignty, including the President of the Republic and the National Assembly, as well as the assumption of office by members of the Government. It is experiencing a dynamic reconstruction and development process marked by the consolidation of macroeconomic stability that has had positive effects on the stabilization of the national currency. In addition, the rehabilitation and modernization of major productive and social infrastructure, namely the reconstruction of roads, railways, electricity supply and distribution systems, water supply systems and sanitation and telecommunication networks, are contributing to the progressive improvement of the living conditions of Angolans.

Political stability and the strengthening of institutional capacity have enabled the Angolan economy to grow at an average rate of 9.2 per cent over the past five years, while the non-oil sector has grown at an average rate of 12 per cent. Those growth rates were due to effective measures by the Government aimed at stabilizing the fiscal, monetary and currency

macroeconomic indicators and thereby facilitating the revival of the economy.

The fight against hunger and the struggle to reduce and eradicate poverty are two of the biggest challenges being addressed by the Angolan State owing to their impact on people's lives. Indeed, their resolution is crucial if we are to build a more prosperous society and achieve social justice.

Despite Angola's successes in the last decade, it was not possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as we had wished. However, the country's macroeconomic development indicators have permitted the Committee for Development Policy of the Economic and Social Council to consider Angola eligible to graduate from its least developed country status starting in 2015.

On behalf of the Angolan Government, we would like to express our gratitude for the trust that investors have shown in us and for the assistance provided by international partners which, added to investment from national sources, has allowed us to achieve the level of economic growth the country has been experiencing. We are aware that there is still much to do to ensure that the high growth rates the country has seen in the recent past are reflected in an effective, systematic and gradual increase in the standard of living of the Angolan people, through a better distribution of national income and higher employment levels, especially among youth, and increased and better investment in the area of social welfare.

In conclusion, I must reiterate Angola's commitment to the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and state that we will continue to engage in the search for solutions to the challenges facing the international community.

The meeting rose at 2.45 p.m.

United Nations A/67/PV.20

General Assembly

Official Records

Sixty-seventh session

20th plenary meeting
Monday, 1 October 2012, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Charles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Albert del Rosario, Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines.

Mr. Del Rosario (Philippines): Allow me to congratulate the President on his election and to offer the steadfast support of my country for his term.

Each year we renew our commitment to our United Nations and to the Charter that enshrines, in the plainest of language, our hopes and aspirations for a progressive, peaceful and secure world. Our Organization and our Charter have survived and thrived through dark times and great adversity. The letter and spirit of the Charter remain alive and vibrant in a constantly changing world. Our work continues to be important, even in the face of doubts about the relevance of multilateral institutions.

All that was possible because at the heart of our determination to build peace has been our commitment to the rule of law. Keeping faith in the law allows us to treat each other fairly and in the spirit of sovereign equality. It provides the rules that enable nations to relate to one another and work together. It reduces arbitrariness and unilateralism. Fidelity to the rule of law allows us not only the means to resolve differences but also the substance on which to build better understanding.

Our advocacy for the rule of law not only is born of our experience and insights as a founding Member of the United Nations and an active participant in international affairs, but also is deeply rooted in our experience as a nation. Our freedom was hard-won. Our democracy was achieved only after decades of dictatorship. Our governance was sullied by corruption and patronage in previous years.

Our President, Benigno S. Aquino III, has placed the rule of law at the centre of his governance. As a result, the culture of impunity has been neutralized, our economy is on the upswing and our people's rights and freedoms are assured.

Among the gravest threats that continue to face us today is the deadly testament of man's ability to destroy his fellow man. The full force of the rule of law must be brought to bear to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to promote nuclear disarmament and to end the flow of illicit weapons. The Philippines is proud to have presided over the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The historic adoption of the 64 action points strengthened the legal regime of the Treaty.

We also support nuclear-weapon-free zones, including the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone created by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is essential that such a zone be created

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for the volatile Middle East, as envisaged by the 2010 Review Conference. The Philippines commends the States of the region, the depository States of the 1995 resolution 50/78, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Government of Finland for setting the stage for the 2012 Conference that will pursue that most urgent objective.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is another critical pillar of global disarmament and non-proliferation. The Philippines commends Indonesia for being the latest annex 2 State to ratify the Treaty, and it reiterates its call to the remaining eight annex 2 States to accede at the soonest possible time. Other States not included in annex 2, but not parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, must do the same to ensure the universality of the Treaty.

We must also actively pursue respect for the law of peace and humanitarian law in the numerous regional conflicts that affect the lives, safety and well-being of millions of people around the world. Towards that end, peacekeeping is the crucial tool by which the Charter's mandate is carried out. Despite its limited resources, the Philippines is doing its part in that important task. We are currently a major contributor to United Nations peacekeeping missions. We call on others to also do all that they can. And we support innovative efforts to help embattled communities, including proposals on possible unarmed peacekeeping that would expand the civilian component of our endeavours.

The Philippines also recognizes the important role of women in the promotion of peace and continues to deploy more female peacekeepers to peacekeeping missions. We aim to attain and surpass the 10 per cent deployment target of women in country troop contingents and 20 per cent for police deployments.

With a tenth of the population of our country in foreign lands, there is a very real and human dimension to our quest to strengthen the rule of law. To further galvanize international dialogue and cooperation, the Philippines has been among the principal advocates for developing norms of international law that will protect not only our overseas Filipinos but all migrants. Human trafficking is a crime of such magnitude that it cannot be dealt with by a single nation or even by a group of nations. The international community as a whole must stand together against that scourge. For that reason, the Philippines became a founding member of the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking, and we are the main sponsor of the biennial General Assembly resolution on trafficking in women and girls.

In pursuit of that objective, we call on all Member States to implement the Global Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons and to ratify and enforce human rights instruments such as the Palermo Protocol and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Many of my country's overseas Filipinos are found on merchant ships. Filipinos form the bulk of seafarers. Many have fallen victim to pirates. Maritime piracy continues to be a menace to the entire world. A full 80 per cent of world trade travels by sea — almost six billion tons of cargo, moved by some 93,000 merchant vessels, manned by 1.25 million seafarers. The business and human costs of piracy cannot be overstated. We support bilateral, multilateral, regional and interregional efforts to address the impact of piracy, including measures to improve the welfare of affected seafarers.

The Philippine Constitution values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for all human rights. Our National Human Rights Action Plan 2009-2014 aims to mainstream human rights standards into all parts of the national Government and national life. The Plan fully respects our obligations under the eight major international human rights treaties.

As a founding and current member of the Human Rights Council, the Philippines works with the other members of the Council to safeguard the human rights of vulnerable groups, such as migrants, women, children, young people, the elderly, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. The Philippines has actively contributed to initiatives on human rights, extreme poverty, human rights education, combating trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and climate change.

The Philippines was one of the first nations to submit to the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council. Last month, the Council adopted by consensus our second report under that review mechanism.

The noble vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of many other profound declarations is far from being realized for the poor, the deprived, the oppressed and the marginalized. The recent global financial and economic crises have left such vulnerable

sectors of our societies in even greater danger. The Philippine Government therefore strongly supports measures for the empowerment of those disadvantaged and endangered groups and strongly advocates policies that aim to raise their participation and integration in society.

For that reason, it is important to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to plan for the post-MDG period, after 2015. Accordingly, the Philippines, together with Tanzania, initiated resolution 66/124, entitled "High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities". The 2013 High-level Meeting seeks the inclusiveness of the disabled, a cause to which all should rally.

We are instituting measures to enhance the role and the status of women and are strengthening their protection through the Philippine Commission on Women, whose foundation predates the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, through the key legislation of the Magna Carta of Women and through the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2015.

Migration remains an unheralded and underappreciated dimension of globalization today. Yet the reality is that hundreds of millions live and work outside their native lands, providing benefits to both their host nations and their countries of origin. The Global Forum on Migration and Development, which the Philippines chaired in 2008, allows us to share our practical experiences in migration management and in protecting the rights and welfare of all migrants. We look forward to a successful outcome of the Forum summit in Port Louis, Mauritius, in November.

Earlier this year, the Philippines was pleased to ratify two key international instruments that affect migrants everywhere, namely, the Maritime Labour Convention and the Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Our ratification brings those two agreements into force next year.

As a further indication of our commitment to protecting the rights of migrants, the Philippines will co-host a regional meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, under the title "International Migrant Domestic Care Workers at the Interface of Migration and Development", in Manila later this month, with the support of UN-Women, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration.

The rule of law is an instrument of justice and development. Yet the continuing global economic challenges and financial instability make it even more important that we focus on ensuring that the rule of law gives everyone their due. Poverty, hunger, poor health and education and a deteriorating environment are threats to all and require nothing less than our concerted and collective response.

In all development efforts, we must respect the principles and norms of sustainability that are crucial to the continued health of the Earth and of our peoples. Consequently, the Philippines will further integrate key ideas from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development into the review of its medium-term development plan, even as we continue to pursue the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

For many developing countries such as the Philippines, food security remains a crucial issue. Recent events have shown that the capacity to source affordable food can affect millions of people, sometimes even to the extent of their sheer survival. We express our appreciation to the General Assembly for the adoption of resolution 66/222, declaring 2014 the International Year of Family Farming.

As a country particularly prone to natural disasters, including those wrought by climate change, we value the work being done in advancing the management of natural disaster risk reduction. Global and regional cooperation through partnerships is the best way to strengthen the international humanitarian and emergency response system.

Natural disasters plague mankind. The forces of nature are difficult to contain. That should not be the case in humankind's quest for peace. While natural disasters are impossible to prevent, the same is not true of war and conflict.

The United Nations was created to protect the weak from the strong, to provide for the equality of all sovereign States and to enshrine the rule of law as the governing principle in regulating international disputes.The Philippines is therefore steadfast in promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes through a rules-based approach. We stand firmly behind the efforts of the United Nations to promote the rule of law and mediation.

In 1982, we adopted the Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes. This year marks its thirtieth anniversary. The principles and processes set out in the Manila Declaration remain applicable to this day and are a stark reminder that we have yet to overcome the barriers that divide countries and peoples throughout the planet. For that reason, we share the President's view that "Bringing about the adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" is essential to the future peace, progress and prosperity of all nations.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the rule of law, and given the maritime disputes that have intensified in the Asian region, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has never been more relevant than it is today. All States must respect their obligations to settle their maritime disputes by peaceful means under UNCLOS, without the threat or use of force. A rules-based approach under UNCLOS can peacefully resolve the Asian maritime disputes.

Today, my country faces its most serious challenge — a challenge to the security of its maritime domain and the integrity of its national territory, as well as its effective protection of its marine environment. To address this challenge and to arrive at a durable resolution, we must rely on the rule of law and not the force of arms. We must rely on the body of rules that state that disputes must be resolved peacefully. We must rely on the norms and rules enshrined in UNCLOS. We therefore rely on our friends and allies and all those who believe in the peaceful and fair management of the seas and oceans to uphold the rule of law and UNCLOS. We will endeavour to elicit a more proactive approach from the General Assembly.

We often hear the quote that "we are a country of laws and not of men". I shall modify it to say that "we are a community of nations and not of hegemons". Let us make this a reality. Let us all, without exception, respect the international legal framework to utilize institutions and adhere to commitments in treaties and conventions. For in so doing, we create global norms that will serve our nations in good stead today and in the future, and we will preserve the one great institution that we have charged with promoting peace and prosperity in our world, our United Nations. If we achieve this, rather than being forced to accept that might is right, we will instead demonstrate that right is might.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Wilfred Elrington, Attorney General, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize.

Mr. Elrington (Belize): It is my distinct honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the Government and people of Belize. I wish to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I am confident that he will guide the deliberations of the Assembly in a forthright and skilful manner.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Belize's unequivocal commitment to the principles, goals and ideals of the United Nations, and to pledge our unconditional support for the success of its endeavours. Based on its performance over the past 67 years, we feel confident to opine that, whereas the United Nations is unquestionably imperfect, just as our democracy is imperfect, our United Nations is also, however — like democracy — the best institution devised by mankind dedicated exclusively to achieving a safer, more just and prosperous world.

As the twenty-first century inexorably evolves, laying bare the fragility and vulnerability of our planet to dangerous global forces, both natural and man-made, which threaten the existence of all living things on our planet, the genius and prescience of the founding fathers in creating the United Nations is illuminated beyond doubt. It is probably debatable whether in 1945 the imperative for mankind to work together in harmony to ensure the survival of our very planet was appreciated by all nations. It may be questionable whether it was universally appreciated in 1945 that it was absolutely necessary to have a global institution dedicated to the protection of mankind against man's penchant for causing destruction as well as against Nature's destructive elements and forces. Today, however, the need for the United Nations is not only manifest to everyone, but there are clarion calls for it to do more and to be more inclusive, representative and democratic, calls to which Belize adds its voice.

My country gained its independence largely in consequence of a resolution of the United Nations calling upon the United Kingdom to grant us our independence by the end of 1981, thereby bringing to an end more than 100 years of colonial administration. But whereas we attained our political independence in September 1981, our sovereignty over our homeland is still being threatened by a territorial claim dating back to the post-1940s by our neighbour Guatemala.

We therefore find the theme for this session's debate a timely and fitting one, namely, bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means. Happily, I can today inform the Assembly that the Governments of Guatemala and Belize both have agreed to a recommendation of the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States to allow the Guatemalan claim to be adjudicated upon by the International Court of Justice if that is the will of the citizens of our respective countries, as expressed in simultaneous referendums to be held on 6 October 2013.

The resolution of the territorial differendum between Belize and Guatemala will not only consolidate Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also enhance the peace and security of our subregion and be conducive to the strengthening and deepening of our regional integration process.

Belizeans are a peace-loving people. We abhor conflict. We believe in the rule of law. And we have faith in the United Nations.

With almost half of our population under the age of 25 and approximately 37 per cent under the age of 18, our nation's future and destiny are inextricably tied to the welfare of our children. And in order for them to attain their full potential, they must be properly nurtured and fed with balanced, nutritious meals. They must be safely and comfortably housed and they must be properly educated and trained, beginning from the time they are in the cradle. Our children must be trained and educated especially in science and technology. They must be trained to think creatively, to be fiercely competitive, to be industrious and to be prudent in the management of our resources. Our Government is convinced that it is only with this type of training and development that our citizens will be able to compete successfully in the world market and generate the wealth that is required to transform our society into a truly developed nation. If we fail our children today, we are setting ourselves up to fail in our common future.

With a view to attaining development objectives, our Government has initiated some ambitious, comprehensive pro-poor policies. For example, our Government is committed to a programme to ensure that low-income Belizean families do not have to face the difficult choice between sending their children to school or buying food. Qualifying families in underserved rural or urban areas can already rely on our conditional cash-transfer programme and on our food pantry programme. We provide education subsidies to families of children attending secondary school. We continue to emphasize and expand early childhood education and to improve access to alternative education. We are investing in improving the quality of the health care to which our citizens have access.

As a small State that took its place among the nations of the world only 31 years ago, Belize is experiencing all the growing pains that naturally afflict the young. Furthermore, our situation is aggravated by the fact our population is less than 350,000 persons, who trace their origins to all over the globe and are consequently multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multilingual and multicultural. With such a diverse population, the urgency of social cohesion cannot be overstated. When we add to this mix the challenges which today confront us all, occasioned by natural disasters such as climate change and by man-made ones such as the global financial collapse and transnational criminal activity, it becomes readily apparent that it is wholly beyond the capacity of any one Government to discharge its obligation towards its citizens solely through national initiatives and devices and solely with domestic resources.

For this reason, the Belize Government has embraced the multilateral system and our cooperation partners around the world. We are partnering with them in many fields, including economic, social, environmental and humanitarian, in our perennial quest to better secure all our citizens and develop them to their fullest potential. In this regard, United Nations funds, programmes and agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the World Health Organization are working tirelessly with countries like Belize to carry out the decisions of the international community and support efforts to meet the aspirations of our people. Belize avails itself of this opportunity to thank all our development partners for the tremendous contributions they make daily to the security and development of our country and people.

We know that more can and, indeed, must be done to raise our ambitions in delivering for the poor, for the needy and for the vulnerable. It is therefore urgent that we move to shape a post-2015 development agenda that reflects our equal stake in a common future, addresses

the concerns of the wealthy and strong, and meets the needs of the poor and the vulnerable.

Belize remains fully supportive of all regional initiatives. We have sought and obtained membership in the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central American Integration System and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. We work closely in all these subregional groupings on the issues of concern to us such as climate change, security and economic development. And here we feel constrained to point out that the impact of climate change on our region has been direct, dire and devastating, compelling us to join forces with our CARICOM partners and with the wider Alliance of Small Island States to advance our interests in the climate change negotiation process. In that connection, Belize is proud of its contribution as host nation of the CARICOM Climate Change Centre, which is tasked to provide technical and scientific advice to inform subregional policy positions in executing adaptation and mitigation projects in our subregion and to raise awareness of the deleterious impact of climate change in our respective countries. We thank the staff of that institution for the sterling work they are doing.

With respect to the nefarious enterprises of transnational trafficking in humans, drugs and arms, Belize subscribes to the view that a regional response is imperative to combat these pernicious scourges. Our countries are not the markets for these illicit commodities. Our countries do not benefit from the immense profits generated by these criminal enterprises, yet we bear the burden of having to divert scarce resources, badly needed for development, to combat the activities of these merchants of death and destruction. Indeed, our countries are overwhelmed by the grim tasks which now befall us of having to mend the shattered lives of our children and of mourning their untimely deaths. That is why Belize is committed to the implementation of the Central America Regional Security Strategy and to working with our partners to ensure that the Strategy has the level of support necessary to guarantee that it is effective.

Our region, Central America and the Caribbean, has been labelled as among the most violent regions of the world, with homicide rates that have reached crisis levels, occasioned largely by the use of small arms and light weapons. But almost all small arms and light weapons found in our region start out as legally manufactured and legally traded arms. Every Member of the United Nations is involved in some measure in this trade, which we believe is of dubious value to mankind. It is therefore deeply regrettable that, despite what appeared to be an emerging consensus and despite the underlying global urgency of a multilateral response, the conclusion of an arms trade treaty has so far been beyond the reach of the international community. It is urgent, in our view, that we redouble our efforts to break the gridlock and reach the compromise necessary to arrive at a consensus on an arms trade treaty as soon as possible.

The States of Latin America and the Caribbean are almost all classified — wrongly and unjustly, in our view — as middle-income countries. That is a generic classification that masks the varied challenges our countries continue to face arising from poverty, high levels of income inequality, economic vulnerabilities and debt. As a consequence, all our countries have been calling for a change in paradigm so that the classification of countries as middle-income countries no longer guides development cooperation. We urge all our development partners to heed this call and address this situation.

Finally, we would like to echo the call of other Members of this institution who have advocated the lifting of the economic embargo against Cuba, which continues to fetter the development of that sister Caribbean nation and its people.

Belize also notes and joins those positive voices that support Taiwan. We therefore urge Taiwan's full participation in the United Nations.

We ask also that urgent attention be given to the concerns of the people of Israel and Palestine, whose legitimate expectation to live peaceful, fruitful lives continues to be frustrated. And we stand in solidarity with the citizens of the Middle East, particularly those in Syria, in their quest for those democratic freedoms to which we all aspire.

As we move ahead to take on the new challenges that will emerge during the sixty-seventh session, as we redouble our efforts to address the long-standing problems our world faces, and as we renew our faith in the multilateral system, the role of the Assembly and of our United Nations Organization will become increasingly critical and relevant. This is the only body that is truly universal in character and which commands legitimacy and authority. The entire world looks to the United Nations to solve the multitudinous problems

which beset mankind. In the circumstances, the United Nations is simply just too big to fail in the discharge of its singular obligation: to safeguard the well-being and safety of humankind and planet Earth.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Makei (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We often invoke the phrase "the spirit of San Francisco". We do that when we speak and think about positive aspects of international relations. Indeed, the message sent from the 1945 Conference in San Francisco offered immense hope to the generation that had just survived the most horrible war ever experienced — hope for building a fundamentally new world. Justice was intended to replace violence, cooperation was to replace lawlessness. The United Nations, founded in that city, was called upon to become the key element of a new order.

Have the hopes, born in San Francisco, come true? To some extent, they have. After all, today there is no sign of the sharp ideological confrontation that characterized the twentieth century. Nor is there the direct, open conflict between the major Powers that had marked all previous centuries with its violence. What is more, such scourges as colonialism, slavery and apartheid have been irrevocably consigned to oblivion.

But the spirit of San Francisco was about something more than just preventing the recurring mistakes of the past. First and foremost, it was a message about a promising future. Unfortunately, that is precisely what has failed to become a reality. Why? Reinhold Niebuhr, an outstanding American philosopher who was writing in those fateful times, noted that general community is established only when the knowledge that we need one another is supplemented by the recognition that the other form of life, or that unique other community, is the limit beyond which our ambitions must not run.

Today that point is as insightful as it was then. Some countries see neither the limits of their foreign policy nor forms of statehood other than their own. And that is exactly what gives rise to many of today's geopolitical problems. States that refuse to follow patterns imposed from the outside and choose to defend their real sovereignty must pay dearly for that right.

Take the case of Cuba. The historic choice to pursue an independent path of development that was made by its people more than five decades ago encountered rejection and economic blockade on the part of those who still believe, in the twenty-first century, that they can continue to write the history of humankind in the same manner as they did in the past. And that is not the only example.

Belarus is fully convinced that any attempt to make someone do something against their will is doomed to fail. Are we not learning the lessons of the past? After all, neither weapons nor wealth constitute the greatest source of power on Earth. That power stems rather from the spirit of self-determination. If a nation has embarked on its own path of peaceful and progressive development, then no external force is able to stop it in its tracks. Battles can be won against such a nation, but never wars.

The time of imperialism, in whatever lofty slogans it is now being dressed — democracy, human rights, good governance — is irreversibly past. Furthermore, today we are weighed down by global economic challenges, nearly all of which have resulted from a policy of so-called market fundamentalism relentlessly pursued by its proponents over the past four decades. Its major outcome is a steady rise in inequality at all levels. Essentially we are witnessing the great divergence. Clearly, the situation resembles a slowly ticking time-bomb of future mass upheavals fraught with unpredictable consequences.

Unfortunately, the current economic woes are structural and therefore unlikely to be quickly and decisively resolved. That is attested to by the fact that the crisis persists all over the world four years after it began. The measures adopted over that period have failed to do much to remedy the situation. Yet, what is far more disturbing is that the countries whose policies had nothing to do with market fundamentalism have also experienced severe hardships. Because of the growing global interdependence of all aspects of international life, they simply have no other option.

We call attention to another chronic ailment of modernity, of a moral nature. Double standards in the foreign policy of the world Powers have become a norm. As a result, those major world players are willing to go to great lengths to cater to the interests of their "friends". Yet they advocate the forced imposition of democracy and human rights on their adversaries. Guided solely by their own interests, the players who were shaking hands with you yesterday openly contribute to your downfall today. In considering human rights situations in other

countries under a microscope, those players have refused to acknowledge the obvious faults in their own countries. In other words, we have come to witness the rise of unscrupulous and barbaric behaviour in foreign policy that is worthy of the teachings of Machiavelli himself.

It is unfortunate that the United Nations, by and large, has been sidelined in that context. Nevertheless, it has not been the fault of the Organization. The brainchild of San Francisco has simply not been allowed to function in the manner conceived by its founders.

Is there a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation? We are certain that there is. The current challenges have not become insurmountable yet. We will be able to overcome them. However, that will require us to revive the spirit of San Francisco. We should return to the principles and foundations, which could serve as the building blocks for a better world today. Multilateralism, justice and cooperation are as relevant today as they were in 1945.

So, what in practical terms must be done? Belarus does not pretend to have exhaustive answers. We would like just to draw attention to four areas that, in our view, are most crucial: the rule of law, politics, economics and the environment. First, to establish the rule of law globally, the system of international law must become fully functional. Forged through centuries of suffering, it is the foundation without which all other elements of modern civilization cannot operate. Having signed the Charter of the United Nations, the world's countries committed themselves to abide by the principles of international law. In other words, they refused to live any longer under conditions of destructive anarchy and lawlessness.

International law has been shaped as a historic compromise between the interests of all States. It may be supplemented and revised only if all States agree to do so. There should be no place for arbitrary interpretations that seek to subordinate international law to private interests. Let us bear in mind that such behaviour leads to infringement of the interests of other international actors. That is why no trendy concepts such as humanitarian intervention or responsibility to protect can justify interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States.

Secondly, in political terms, we need a stable and predictable global order. It is up to us whether we will have one. Global systems cannot establish and manage themselves — they result from human action. At this point we are living in a system that may be viewed as a dysfunctional multipolarity. Indeed, we are forced to witness a rising number of global players that are proving unable to cope effectively with increasing global demands.

If we fail to restructure the situation, then we will most likely end up with a scenario that is even worse — something that resembles the dark era of the Middle Ages but aggravated by ever more dangerous transnational threats and challenges. Thus, again we return to the perennial question: how is it possible to build an effective global order in a world that lacks a global government?We can offer an idea. A response would involve addressing the structural issue by means of a functional approach. Let us try to devise an effective global system by tackling specific functional problems. After all, is it not the case that all positive-minded global stakeholders have an interest in addressing fewer problems or eliminating them altogether?

We are deeply convinced that global partnerships will provide the means whereby we realize that vision. They can bring together multiple players on the world stage in a common effort against specific transnational threats and challenges. So let us begin working on and implementing functional partnerships on each of the issues. Indeed, my country has already been doing just that, for instance, in the fight against human trafficking within the framework of the global partnership against slavery and human trafficking proposed by Belarus some time ago.

Thirdly, there is the economic dimension. Mass protests across the world, like the Occupy Wall Street movement, testify to public rejection of the prevailing development model. This is hardly surprising; after all, the model was built with the interests of corporate capital in mind. Clearly, the classic recipe of Adam Smith does not work in a modern world. Contrary to general expectations, the invisible hand of the market has not led to universal public well-being. The experience of the past few decades indicates that the invisible hand contributes to the enrichment of the corporate sector alone, while impoverishing others.

The global economy of the twenty-first century is too sophisticated to be left to the whims of market forces. That economy requires a reasonable balance among its various elements. As far as the balance per se is concerned, it cannot be established by default, someone must do it. Only a State is able to accomplish that task,

and more crucially, a strong, socially oriented State that does not live by borrowing from future generations, as is currently the case in some advanced countries.We are convinced that a State-based paradigm, as we suggest, will permit the severe imbalance to be redressed. Likewise, it is key to significantly reducing poverty in the world.

Finally, what is required of us in terms of the environment? Climate change is the central and defining challenge of today's world. This is the wall that separates current and future generations from a prosperous future. Our efforts in all other areas will prove futile if we fail to tackle this core challenge. We must preserve the life-giving ecosystem of the Earth. This, therefore, is where there is the greatest need for comprehensive international cooperation.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was held in June. The Conference's decisions essentially marked the start of a new green deal that is expected to rally all stakeholders for common action. We need to move forward decisively to implement its individual elements. It is, above all, about elaborating sustainable development goals and ensuring the transfer and integration of green technologies. In the context of the follow-up to Rio+20, the formulation of a comprehensive United Nations energy agenda must be seriously considered. We believe it would contribute to an urgently needed comprehensive approach to addressing the interrelated issues of climate change, energy and food security.

The United Nations is the natural place for the implementation of all the ideas articulated above. No other international body possesses such universal legitimacy. Let us therefore, at last, empower the United Nations. We are certain that the United Nations will then be able to realize with dignity the vision set forth in San Francisco so many years ago.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Phandu T. C. Skelemani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Botswana.

Mr. Skelemani (Botswana): Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to join preceding speakers in expressing our felicitations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. Let me also seize the opportunity to sincerely commend his predecessor, Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, of the State of Qatar, for his skilful stewardship of the sixty-sixth session. My delegation is confident that under the President's guidance and wise leadership, the General Assembly will achieve a successful and fruitful outcome. I therefore pledge the full support and cooperation of my delegation to him, in the discharge of his onerous responsibilities.

Botswana is among the developing countries that have been adversely affected by the 2008 global economic and financial crisis. Consequently, we were compelled to reorder our priorities and also defer implementation of various approved projects in our National Development Plan, some of which were of strategic national importance. In that regard, we continue to be concerned that many of our traditional donors who helped us to progress to where we are today, have virtually abandoned us following Botswana's graduation to higher middle-income developing country status. Contrary to the perception that Botswana is an economically well-off country, we now, more than ever before, need development assistance, on account of the varied nature and gravity of the challenges we continue to face.

With respect to the African continent, Botswana has followed with concern some recent peculiar developments. The military coups in Mali and Guinea-Bissau early this year are a sad reminder of what we thought was a closed chapter of the dark days of African politics driven by self-interest. Those developments seriously undermine the significant progress which Africa has made to date in embracing and consolidating democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. We therefore call on the African Union to remain firm and resolute in its rejection of unconstitutional changes of Government on the African continent, and we implore the international community to give full importance and full support to the African Union in that regard.

Elsewhere on the continent, we particularly welcome the recent agreement between the Sudan and South Sudan on the implementation of the African Union road map, aimed at resolving outstanding issues in the relations between the two countries. However, we remain concerned about the fragile security situation, and we therefore appeal to both parties to exercise maximum restraint and to commit to honouring the terms of the road map. Although the appeal is made to both sides, we are very much aware that the Sudan is the main cause of the instability between the two countries.

The catalogue of incidents of provocation and blatant acts of aggression against the Republic of South Sudan by the North that has led to instability in that region has been typical of the Sudanese regime for many years.

We live in times when our common well-being is seriously compromised by such threats as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, climate change, environmental degradation, underdevelopment and pandemic diseases, coupled with the effects of the global economic and financial crisis and internal conflicts. The resolution of the myriad of challenges and threats confronting mankind requires urgent and concerted action by the international community. Because of its universality, the United Nations commands the requisite legitimacy and moral authority to provide guidance and leadership in addressing those threats and challenges. It is therefore imperative that the United Nations of the twenty-first century respond effectively to present realities and effectively handle future challenges.

We believe that the international community should act and speak out strongly and forthrightly against human rights abuses and atrocities wherever and whenever they occur. In that regard, my delegation observes with deep regret that, over the past few months, the world community has watched helplessly and failed hopelessly to intervene as Syria descended into protracted anarchy. In the process, the Syrian people have been subjected to a cycle of violent repression and some of the worst human rights abuses and atrocities known to mankind.

Even as we speak, the violent crackdown and bloodshed in that country continue unabated. Al-Assad has displaced more than a million Syrians to satisfy his lust for power. He has caused around 300,000 Syrians to flee into neighbouring countries because of his criminal acts. He has slaughtered 20,000 of his citizens in order to remain President. He has killed men, women, children and babies to achieve that. The international community has, regrettably, failed to respond collectively. And Syria remains a Member of the United Nations, a body with the expressed objective of defending humankind. That surely cannot be right. Syria's allies in the Security Council and in the region need to be equally condemned.

The uprisings in the Middle East, commonly referred to as the Arab Spring, have demonstrated that no amount of force can suppress the will of the people forever. The situation in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, where the popular will of the people has ushered in democratic dispensations, attests to that.

Concerning Libya, which had to engage in an internal conflict to rid itself of a brutal dictator, we commend the Libyan people and their allies in the military coalition that imposed a no-fly zone in order to remove Colonel Al-Qadhafi and his regime.

My delegation is of the view that given its mandate to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council should assume the high moral ground in defending the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as those currently being committed in Syria. The principle of the responsibility to protect, as expressed in Security Council resolution 1674 (2006), should be forcefully applied wherever crimes against humanity occur. In that connection, my delegation condemns in the strongest possible terms the persistent vetoes by China and Russia of successive Security Council resolutions aimed at putting pressure on the Syrian leadership to cease its heinous crimes against its citizens. We therefore call on those members of the Council to live up to their responsibilities, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter. We urge the international community to act swiftly to save the people of Syria from further unwarranted bloodshed.

Botswana will continue to sponsor and support the various General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions aimed at addressing the situation in Syria, as a practical demonstration of our unwavering commitment towards a resolution of the Syrian crisis. It is for that reason that we join forces with like-minded countries in calling for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court for investigation, so that those responsible for crimes against humanity can be held accountable. Al-Assad and his regime should be removed as soon as possible. We must encourage the opposition to unite and to form a transition administration that we can all recognize.

We wish to commend Turkey and the other countries that have taken on the burden of accommodating Syrian refugees, have spoken out against the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Syria and have responded, with others, to the plea of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for contributions. For its part, Botswana has made a modest contribution to UNHCR to help the humanitarian relief efforts for Syrian refugees.

We also wish to commend responsible human-rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, for the work they do in seeking to safeguard the principles that protect humankind. Their mission — to act as watchdogs in matters of safeguarding human rights — is a very necessary one. Similarly, we commend those humanitarian non-governmental organizations that work tirelessly, with meagre resources and under very difficult circumstances, to bring relief to refugees affected by natural and man-made disasters.

Human rights abuses and atrocities are not limited to Syria. It is in that context that we affirm our support for the International Criminal Court and urge it to continue to fulfil its mandate, including prosecuting those indicted for human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. We therefore appeal to States parties to fully cooperate with the Court in its efforts to bring the suspected perpetrators of such crimes to justice.

We wish to add our voice in condemning the violence that occurred following the release of a publication that offended people of the Islamic faith. There can be no justification for such a violent response. The violence itself caused offence to its victims. Retaliation against offensive expressions therefore cannot take the form of other offensive actions aimed at innocent parties. However, where democracy is defined as Government of the people, by the people, for the people — in other words, doing what is in the best interests of the people — how can it be in the people's best interests if freedom of speech results in insults?

Other freedoms, in a democratic dispensation, include freedom of association — but we cannot associate with terrorist or criminal groups without consequences, since it is not in the people's best interests to live among terrorists and criminals. Freedom of expression allows for protests — but only peaceful protests — in democracies, because it is also not in people's best interests to have violent protests; and in democracies consequences do follow if protests become violent. The same goes for freedom of the press, if it is abused, as it often is. There must be consequences, in order to protect people's interests from misinformation and attempts to discredit or defame them. With all such freedoms there must be limits. Democracy is supposed to be responsible. Causing offence and insult cannot by any stretch of the imagination be passed off as what we want in a democracy. Trying to justify irresponsible actions as permitted under any of these freedoms, including freedom of speech, is itself irresponsible.

Turning to environmental issues, we note the limited and disappointing progress made at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in addressing sustainable development issues, as has been the case at similar summits in the past. As we all know, the world is facing the twin challenges of scarcity of resources and climate change. Those problems are particularly acute in Africa, owing to the high incidence of poverty there.

To respond to those big problems, which clearly need visionary solutions and strong partnerships for sustainability on a scale and with an impact that are unprecedented, my country took the important initiative of hosting in May the Summit for Sustainability in Africa. Participation was at the Head of State level, and included representatives of some of the most influential and significant private-sector stakeholders in the world. The Summit adopted the Gaborone Declaration, which, among other things, provides for policy improvements at both the Government and the private-sector levels, aimed at integrating the value of natural capital development. The Declaration also calls for increased private-sector investment in Africa to help reduce food insecurity, improve livelihoods and increase sustainability. We therefore call on the United Nations system and the international community in general to commit to implementing the Declaration.

There are many important and urgent issues affecting developing countries that must be addressed. They include technology transfer, funding and capacity-building in other areas, aimed at enabling such countries to adapt to the requirements of a green economy in the context of sustainable development. In that regard, we urge the developed world to help developing countries to address these critical issues and take accelerated action in order to deal with climate change and its causes in their economies.

However, we welcome the agreement to launch an intergovernmental negotiation process that will lead to the adoption of sustainable development goals as part of the post-2015 development agenda, when the implementation process of the Millennium Development Goals will have run its course. My delegation believes that the process for developing sustainable development goals should be synchronized with the 2013 review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

We would like to take this opportunity to commend the work done by environmental organizations worldwide in their efforts to save the planet from climate change and its negative effects.

Botswana participated in the ill-fated United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty in July, whose purpose was for Member States to agree on common international standards for regulating the international trade in conventional weapons. We believe that, when adopted, an arms trade treaty will complement the United Nations programme of action for combating the proliferation of arms and ammunition, which continue to cause untold suffering.

Before concluding, I wish to state that Botswana fully supports the call for implementing the Assembly's successive resolutions on lifting sanctions against Cuba, something we believe is logical and long overdue.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Winston Lackin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Suriname.

Mr. Lackin (Suriname): On behalf of Mr. Desiré Delano Bouterse, President of the Republic of Suriname, I avail myself of this opportunity to extend to Mr. Vuk Jeremić my congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. The wealth of experience that he brings to this body will certainly assist him in successfully discharging his duties. We pledge our full support and cooperation.

Allow me to salute his predecessor for his skilful leadership at the sixty-sixth session. We wish him well in his future endeavours. To Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon we pledge our support for his valuable contribution in advancing the purposes and principles of the Organization.

In his annual statement last week, in which he introduced the 2013 national budget, the President of Suriname highlighted Suriname's strengths and the opportunities and challenges we are facing as a young, vibrant member of the international community. As refiners and exporters of crude oil and its derivatives, as well as producers and exporters of gold, a combination of windfalls in earnings related to the trade of those commodities and the application of prudent fiscal policies, have resulted in a politically and economically stable environment. That stability in turn has become conducive to solid domestic and foreign investments in the more sustainable sectors, in which agriculture and tourism score high. The design and construction of relevant infrastructure demonstrate Suriname's potential to be a player on the supply side of strategic commodities.

President Bouterse also presented a social package in which education and health care figure prominently. He made the point that strong international ratings are encouraging indicators for investors. However, the citizens of Suriname who lack the right opportunities will share in the achievements only if the Government is able to present them with a package comprising job-oriented education at an academic as well as a vocational level, adequate health services, sports facilities, access to potable water, information and communications technology facilities and proper waste disposal. The challenge of financing such an improved social package makes it necessary to empower our production and service sectors by providing funds and know-how to our entrepreneurs.

Suriname, as a young nation, is experiencing an ongoing decolonization process that involves both its structure and its mindset. Building a nation of half a million people constitutes an enormous challenge when at least seven different ethnic and cultural traditions originate from the Americas, Africa and Europe, while a considerable part of the population traces its roots to India, Indonesia, China and the Middle East. .

Suriname is known for the presence of a synagogue located next to a mosque in the heart of the capital Paramaribo, while Christian churches coexist with Hindu temples and places of worship with a strong African affinity. We are proud to state that we have been able to convert that challenge into a unique and exemplary benefit and that the divide-and-rule policy of colonial days is gradually disappearing, making way for mutual respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, which redound to the advantage of all our citizens.

Suriname is a country blessed with an exuberant array of biodiversity. That splendid gift of the Almighty must be cherished and protected to the fullest extent. It needs to be mapped out in a way that allows for responsible use. The challenge we face is responding to the genuine developmental needs of our people, while at the same time respecting and preserving biodiversity for future generations, and indeed for humankind.

My country has committed itself to that cause by, among other actions, creating a nature reserve of 1.8 million hectares. We have accepted the obligation

to educate our small gold miners in the use of modern technology that will not only prove more lucrative and safe but also respect the need for a clean environment, allowing for potable water and profitable agriculture. Suriname must remain green and smart.

Suriname is very much aware of the fact that while we have solid advantages as a nation, we can only survive and prosper by adapting to a world that is becoming more and more interdependent. Having been blessed with oil reserves, trillions of cubic metres of fossil water reserves, along with hundreds of rivers, swamps, creeks, arable land and minerals, including gold, copper, granite, rare earth and more, Suriname has become a focal point in view of the ever-growing scarcity of those commodities.

In order to maintain and enhance our political stability, we must deepen and widen our eco-commercial position and be able to keep our country and people safe from any outside intervention and interference. Suriname has engaged in a serious quest for integration with its immediate neighbours — Guyana, France and Brazil — at a bilateral and, wherever possible, tripartite level. Suriname is also a devoted participant in the historic movement of regional integration that is growing in form and substance. We are active members of the Union of South American Nations, the secretariat of which will be based in Suriname as from July 2013.

We are committed to the creation of a Caribbean Community multinational corporation, giving a more meaningful basis to the single market and economic goals put in place since 2006. As one of the founding members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, we continue to be dedicated to the integration mechanism of the Americas, remaining committed to the principles and objectives of the Organization of American States.

Although our region is making enormous strides in furthering democracy and development, we must draw the attention of the international community to the lack of progress in assisting one of the most disadvantaged countries in the Western Hemisphere, namely Haiti. We call on the international community to honour its pledges to assist the Government and people of Haiti in their efforts to rebuild their beloved country.

Furthermore, our quest for integration will never be complete if we continue to accept the isolation of our sister nation, Cuba, as a consequence of the unjustly imposed economic and trade embargo. Once again, we firmly call for an immediate end of those coercive measures, which cause so much suffering to the people of Cuba.

When Suriname became a Member of the United Nations 36 years ago, we were little aware of the importance of a number of issues not specifically dealing with decolonization. Now we have grown in our understanding. We realize that a properly functioning United Nations, including a democratically based Security Council, has the potential to become the single most important stabilizing factor in a world that has moved from bipolarity to multipolarity. In the world of ever-shifting economic, political, diplomatic and military Powers, the themes of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly were appropriately chosen.

We specifically want to draw the Assembly's attention to the need for dialogue in situations of conflict. In our understanding, it is not easy for Powers that have grown accustomed to controlling other nations to grasp fully what it means to move away from dominance and dependence to interdependence and the need for dialogue in solving real or alleged conflicts. Both the United States of America and the Federative Republic of Brazil clearly endorsed the concept in their statements at the opening of our general debate.

We urge all Member States in general and the former colonial Powers in particular to accept the new reality of our world by categorically refraining from applying their own standards in judging the outcome of other countries' democratic structures and aspirations, disrespecting the internationally accepted principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of nations all over the world.

It is within that framework that I quote the closing remarks at the presentation of the 2013 national budget by Mr. Desiré Delano Bouterse, President of the Republic of Suriname:

> "As regards the sovereignty of our beloved Suriname as an independent nation, our principal task is none other than to respect and to defend the sovereignty of our nation against all violations and attacks from outside.
>
> "Whenever and by whomever our sovereignty is being challenged, our legitimate Government has no other duty than to defend and safeguard the entrusted sovereignty of the country".

The United Nations was built on the ashes of the Second World War, and we pledged to save successive generations from the scourge of war. The peaceful settlement of disputes is the only avenue through which we can ensure that the planet will be saved from annihilation. That principled stand must be applied to all areas of conflict, whether the conflict is in the Middle East, Africa, the Americas or anywhere else in the world.

The target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals is fast approaching. The year 2015 will be a decisive year when world leaders will gather once again to assess the implementation of the commitments made. We underscore the importance of creating well-being for all and providing greater opportunities for the vulnerable in our society by giving full access to high-quality education at all levels and affordable and high-quality health care and services, as well as realizing the commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is necessary to increase the ability of women all over the world to bring about change, to ensure that they can exist in an environment free from violence and conducive to their well-being, including access to decent employment, services and housing.

We acknowledge the global burden and threat of non-communicable diseases. In moving towards the full implementation of the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (resolution 66/2, annex), as well as other commitments we have made, we stress the importance of multisectoral actions, strengthening health systems, ensuring the availability of adequate and sustained resources, as well as enhanced international cooperation through effective partnerships. Suriname has increased its efforts in the fight against those often overlooked silent killers.

Mr. Touray (Sierra Leone), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development concluded without an agreement on a clear commitment with regard to the financing of sustainable development. That is a very serious matter, considering the threat of climate change, among others, to a successful outcome of the efforts of small States like Suriname to achieve sustainable development. The international community cannot abandon its obligation to provide the necessary means to combat the serious consequences of overconsumption, pollution and carbon emissions, which threaten to undo our achievements aimed at protecting the environment and securing the well-being of our peoples. We continue to expect the United Nations to spearhead the efforts for technical assistance and to advance continued dialogue.

Suriname is deeply concerned with regard to the basis on which countries in development are classified in the international financial institutional framework. Such classifications, without due consultations, negatively affect the type and level of assistance that a country can receive from international financial institutions. We can only characterize those decisions as undemocratic and as a virtual punishment of our achievements in improving our socioeconomic situation.

In conclusion, I wish to solemnly declare that Suriname will always put its faith in multilateralism through its unwavering support for the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Joseph Bandabla Dauda, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Dauda (Sierra Leone): It is a distinct honour for me to convey the sincere regrets of my President, Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, who, on account of unavoidable circumstances, was unable to address the Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating the President on his election to direct the affairs of this session and to assure him of my delegation's fullest support and cooperation throughout his tenure. Allow me to commend his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and to thank him for the skilful manner in which he efficiently conducted the affairs of the last session. My profound appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his tireless efforts in advancing the United Nations agenda to make the world a peaceful and safer place for humankind.

The President's choice of the theme "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" is a timely wake-up call for the United Nations to fully embrace the fundamental principle upon which our Organization was established. Indeed, only with such adjustments and the practical

manifestation of our collective commitment to peaceful coexistence can we, as a global family, successfully tackle the myriad of prevailing global challenges. They include poverty, hunger, the gross and systematic violation of human rights, extremist fundamentalism, terrorism and transnational organized crime, as well as the reconstruction and strengthening of fragile States and economies emerging from conflict. In that context, we should remind ourselves that, a little over a year ago, the Assembly adopted the landmark resolution 66/291 on mediation that recognizes its growing usefulness as a means of preventing disputes from escalating into conflicts and as a cost-effective tool in the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prevention of conflicts.

Amid such security challenges and global economic uncertainties, the African continent continues to strive hard to contain and to address the resurgence of conflicts in the region by peaceful means. At the regional and subregional levels, the year under review has been marred by sporadic terrorist strikes by extremists, leading to the extensive loss of life and massive destruction of property, including coveted world heritage sites, and the recent killing of the United States Ambassador and three other Americans in Libya. Sierra Leone strongly condemns such brutal and cowardly acts and will continue to work closely with all partners, particularly within the framework of the Mano River Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations, in seeking a lasting solution to that scourge.

Until recently, the use of preventive diplomacy in the maintenance of international peace and security was not used to its fullest potential by the United Nations system. Rather, it was used more as a tool in crisis management. I am, however, heartened by the present impetus and would like to take this opportunity to commend the role of the Secretary-General, his Special Representatives and the crisis-management operations and missions around the world, as well as the increasing role of the AU, subregional organizations and international contact groups, in tackling crisis situations that have emerged globally in recent times.

Sierra Leone will continue to wholeheartedly embrace mediation and other conflict-prevention initiatives as a key and indispensable tool in settling disputes and in preventing and resolving conflicts. The lessons learned from our experience have enhanced our conviction in the core principles of democracy, human rights and good governance as prerequisites for political stability, sustainable peace, security and development. We therefore remain strongly committed to the rule of law, respect for and the protection of human rights, gender equality, the empowerment of women, equal access to justice, fighting corruption with zero tolerance and pursuing the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To that end, we are committed to ensuring participatory governance, conducting free, fair, transparent and credible elections, and combating transnational organized crime in all its forms.

Sierra Leone therefore views with disappointment the fact that the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty ended without a negotiated consensus on the treaty's adoption. The Sierra Leone delegation believes that we must all earnestly endeavour to adopt a well-considered and balanced treaty with adequate provisions to effectively regulate the transfer of conventional weapons. If we continue to delay in that respect, we face the risk of their continuous use in committing grave violations of national and international law, which has the potential to destabilize peace and security. We therefore urge Member States to consider our moral obligation to humankind as our key guiding principle and to sincerely commit to contributing to the establishment of mechanisms to prevent the diversion of such weapons into the illicit market.

In three years, we will reach the target date of 2015 for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. For many Member States, particularly those of the global South, the voyage has been rough and, at times, turbulent. Worse still, the effects of the food, fuel and financial crises that struck the global community in 2008, as well as the impact of climate change, conflicts and deadly pandemics, have further exacerbated the situation and compromised the determination and efforts of developing countries, especially least developed countries (LDCs), to attain the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

We commend Brazil on successfully hosting the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). We also applaud our solidarity and flexibility during the negotiation process, enabling the incorporation of LDCs and conflict-affected countries in the Rio+20 outcome document (resolution 66/288, annex). We look forward to a similar spirit of solidarity in defining sustainable development

goals that take on board the concerns of the most vulnerable members of the community of nations.

Despite the onerous challenges facing the global community, Sierra Leone has recorded significant progress in strengthening its political and economic governance, including the improvement of its social indicators. We have made substantial progress in implementing the President's Agenda for Change (2008-2012), which covers the priorities of our national development aspirations, as well as key peacebuilding priorities, in tandem with the United Nations Joint Vision for Sierra Leone.

The ongoing foreign direct investment in various sectors of the economy, notably the mining sector, is brightening the prospects for the economy. Hopefully, it will place Sierra Leone among the fastest growing economies in the world in the next few years.

The Agenda for Change continues to provide a strong partnership link between Sierra Leone and the United Nations, as well as other international development partners. To date, its implementation has had a great impact on peacebuilding and on laying the foundations for sustainable development and the consolidation of peace.

Sierra Leone today is considered a showpiece of best practices in donor coordination and a success story in peacebuilding. In that regard, we reiterate our call to the international community to continue to invest in our success in the spirit of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, which was agreed in Busan, and the need for special attention to be paid to countries emerging from conflict. The successor development framework to our Agenda for Change, entitled Agenda for Prosperity, is anchored on the New Deal and is well under way.

In its short existence to date, the peacebuilding architecture has proven its worth as envisaged by the leaders at the 2005 World Summit, whose goal was to help countries emerging from conflict make an irreversible transition from war to sustainable peace. As one of the first countries on the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda, Sierra Leone has charted a path that can serve as a learning model for others. In that regard, we strongly believe that strengthening peacebuilding will help to better safeguard countries from relapsing into conflict and sustain peace beyond the life of peacekeeping missions. It will also help ensure that the enormous investments that Member States make in peacekeeping operations will achieve their intended result.

Sierra Leone continues to uphold the principles of interreligious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. At the national level, we have enhanced political stability by strengthening good governance institutions, giving them sufficient leverage and latitude to deliver on their respective statutory mandates. That arrangement has earned the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone an "A status" accreditation from the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions. In that regard, we remain focused on our obligations to report to international treaty bodies and have therefore submitted our initial report with regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, while work is well under way on our reports in compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Along those lines, we recently established a national commission for disabled persons, consistent with the relevant provisions of the 2011 Disability Act, enacted the 2012 Sexual Offences Act to address the specific issue of sexual violence against women and girls, and passed into law the 2012 bill on arms and ammunition to regulate gun ownership so as to ensure compliance with the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. A gender-equality bill is also in process for enactment.

I commend the support of the United Nations and the international partners for the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which has made a number of critical contributions to the advancement of the rule of law at both the national and the international levels. In particular, we compliment the Special Court for bringing to trial perpetrators of crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Sierra Leone during the course of our 11-year conflict. Sierra Leone, the United Nations and the international community can be proud of the Special Court's immense achievements. With our continued support, the Special Court can complete its remaining work.

President Ernest Bai Koroma, in his address to the General Assembly at the opening of its sixty-sixth session, underscored the imperative of peacefully

settling disputes in Africa and the world at large by emphasizing that the world is so interconnected in trade, politics and the social spheres that a single nation's upheaval could affect many other countries (see A/66/PV.20). It is against that background that we, as a country, have continued to nurture closer ties with our sister States in the Mano River basin in order to deepen cooperation and collaboration and address issues of common concern, ranging from transnational organized crime to border disputes. The recent decision by the Presidents of Sierra Leone and her sister Republic of Guinea to demilitarize the Yenga border area and establish a joint committee of the two countries in order to ensure a final peaceful resolution of the Yenga problem is consistent with our commitment to the peaceful resolution of international disputes. Indeed, our steadfast commitment to global peace and security is evident in our participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Lebanon, Somalia, the Sudan, South Sudan and Timor-Leste.

The 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections scheduled to take place on 17 November are barely 46 days away. With the support of our bilateral and multilateral partners, preparations are in full swing for the conduct of the third round of such elections within the decade following the end of our civil conflict. The Government is fully aware that the conduct and outcome of the elections will be a critical benchmark for assessing the level of our gains in the area of peace consolidation and democracy. The Government, relevant stakeholders and our development partners are therefore expressly determined to exert a collective effort and use every available opportunity to ensure that we put solid mechanisms in place for the peaceful conduct and achievement of transparent and credible democratic elections. It is in that regard that, in May this year, all key stakeholders in the country committed themselves to a credible and violence-free process by signing the declaration on the 2012 Elections. We have thus consolidated the electoral laws and established electoral offences courts to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process.

As Coordinator of the Committee of Ten Heads of State of the African Union for the reform of the United Nations Security Council, I am pleased to report to the General Assembly that, at the last AU Summit held in Addis Ababa, African heads of State reaffirmed their strong commitment to the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration containing the African common position on the reform of the Security Council. To that end, we are committed to building alliances in support of the African common position with various interest groups and Member States engaged in the intergovernmental negotiations, with a view to achieving reform of the Security Council as soon as possible. In that pursuit, member States of the African Union have been called upon to include the issue of Security Council reform among the priorities in their foreign policies.

In that respect, Africa continues to engage in the intergovernmental negotiations with an open-door policy aimed at correcting the historical injustice suffered by Africa as the only continent not represented in the permanent-member category of the Council and at the same time underrepresented in the non-permanent category. Since the Security Council remains at the centre of global governance in the maintenance of international peace and security, it is both imperative and compelling that the international community recognize the need described in the 2005 World Summit Outcome to make the Council more broadly representative, efficient and transparent in order to enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions, as well as the need to democratize the Council's decision-making process and correct the lingering historical injustice inflicted upon the continent. In that regard, we urge the wider United Nations membership to work with Africa to urgently address that injustice. Africa is not being unreasonable in its demand, and we all know that procrastination on the matter has led to a travesty of justice and fair play, which undermines the dignity of our peoples.

We are determined at the national level to surmount all impediments on our way to development and to delivering fully on all the projects in our "Agenda for Change". We are confident that with sustained support from our bilateral and multilateral partners, we shall promote socioeconomic progress and provide a better standard of living for our people in an atmosphere of peace and security. What we cannot afford at this time in our history is to fail in our duty and obligation to provide peace, security and sustainable development for our people.

At the global level, as we look at the work that lies before the sixty-seventh session, let us not lose sight of our shared obligation to ensure a peaceful and secure world by resolving our differences through constructive dialogue and thus strengthen the existing

mediation mechanisms provided in the Charter and institutionalized within the United Nations system.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Archbishop Mamberti (Holy See) (*spoke in French*): As I congratulate the President on behalf of the Holy See on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, I have the honour of conveying warm greetings from His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who wishes for him and all members the blessings of all-powerful God.

At a time when the world is witnessing a disturbing increase in bloody regional conflicts, the Holy See is particularly pleased to note the central theme that has been chosen for the work of this session, namely "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means".

Since the establishment of the United Nations, a tight web of structured legal relationships has evolved, covering virtually every aspect of the relations between States and of life in the societies within States. In that regard, the Charter of the United Nations, the major human rights treaties and the treaties governing humanitarian law, along with the Vienna Conventions on the law of treaties and diplomatic law and the key conventions on disarmament, may be viewed as a nearly universal legal corpus that promotes social relations based on the law and that furthers durable peace.

That is a historically unprecedented development and a genuine achievement of the United Nations; it stands as a credit to the United Nations and certainly as one of its most successful achievements with respect to the aims enshrined in the Preamble and first Article of the Charter.

Over the course of the 67 years since the establishment of the United Nations, the world has undergone profound transformation. Growing technical and economic interdependence, along with the exponential development of new forms of communication, has led to the advent of what has commonly been known, ever since the middle of the twentieth century, as the global village: a diverse and continuously evolving village that has experienced astonishing development but that has also seen terrible injustice. In that regard, the labour of legal construction undertaken by the United Nations is a worthy response that promotes the development of that global village, a response that deserves the continued and wholehearted support of Governments and social organizations.

Human history has always presented paradoxical or conflictive situations that have given rise to frustration and feelings of injustice. Today, in a context of generalized interdependence, the disparity between wealth and poverty is more pronounced and unacceptable than ever. The disorderly expansion of technical and economic progress has intensified the gap between those who have the education and the means to advance and those who lack both. The multiple legal and economic ties that unite nations are not sufficiently just and equitable, and they have become a conveyor belt for the serious economic and financial crisis, which has spread as quickly as a forest fire, affecting the most vulnerable first. For some of the world's people, resorting to crime and terrorism or waging war in the name of ideological, ethnic or cultural beliefs seems to be the easiest, if not the only available way to escape poverty and become the heroes of the global village. Such acts of violence are abetted by the perverse use of communications technology and by the excessively easy access to the tools of war.

If, in the 1990s, the state of legal and political progress allowed us to believe that the danger of nuclear war had receded, today the likelihood of regional conflicts with unpredictable outcomes has once again created a threatening atmosphere that should impel us to intensify our efforts to establish a truly constructive dialogue within the international community.

During the period of the Cold War, the United Nations was a meeting place and a point of discussion and balance between the opposing Powers. The Organization managed to support the decolonization and independence of a large number of new States and to mitigate, and even at times resolve, regional, bilateral and civil conflicts in a context that was nonetheless marked by severe ideological confrontation. At the same time, United Nations agencies made an important intellectual, political and judicial contribution to the universal recognition of human rights and strengthened cooperation for development and regional economic integration. Those advances constituted fundamental progress towards strengthening the rule of law, which itself provides a favourable framework and is the best guarantor of human rights and peaceful international cooperation.

Allow me here to welcome the Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels (resolution 67/1), which was adopted at the beginning of this session. The 67 years since the establishment of the United Nations also include a distinguished history of humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping operations and, more recently, peacebuilding operations. Also of special importance for the fate of humanity as a whole have been the adoption of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency aimed at promoting universal accession to the Treaty, controlling the implementation of the Treaty and facilitating international cooperation on the peaceful use of the atom.

Over the past 20 years, the United Nations, together with regional organizations, has made an essential contribution to resolving a number of urgent situations, particularly in Africa, by collaborating with the African Union and other institutions of that continent. Nonetheless, the current reality presents us with a United Nations system without the strength of unity and persuasion that could legitimately be expected of it; a system in which, unfortunately, power relationships are played out to the benefit of specific strategic interests.

Yet the possibilities that emerged at the end of the Cold War seemed to portend a possible strengthening of the institutional and political presence of the United Nations in the service of world's most critical challenges, such as climate change and the preservation of the environment. How is it possible that, despite universal adhesion to the Charter of the United Nations and the essential treaties, we are still unable to establish a just and true form of global governance?

The Holy See would like to offer a moral answer to that question by calling attention to the importance of the values that, of necessity, underlie all human societies. Indeed, before engaging in political or technical considerations, it is important to ask whether the crises currently convulsing the planet are linked to a crisis of trust in the collective values enshrined in the very Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, the question arises whether the crises afflicting the planet are linked to a serious anthropological crisis, which is to say the lack of a shared understanding of what it means to be human.

Today we are witnessing a weakening in the practical reach of the purposes and principles set out in the Preamble and Chapter I of the Charter. I note in particular saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, practicing tolerance with a spirit of good-neighbourliness, uniting strength for the maintenance of peace and security, recourse to peaceful means to settle disputes, in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, and cooperation to solve international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and to promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms.

The loss of trust in the value of dialogue and the temptation to favour a priori one party in national or regional conflicts endanger respect for the legal mechanisms of the United Nations. However, the pre-eminence of the values affirmed by the Charter should lead to the adoption of all means possible to guarantee the protection of the most vulnerable, uphold the rule of law and human rights, and safeguard ancient cultural and religious balances.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The urgency of the situation is all the more obvious given the events taking place in the Middle East, especially in Syria. There can be no solution outside the rules of international law and humanitarian law and implementation of mechanisms established by the Charter of the United Nations. All parties concerned must not only do everything possible to facilitate the mission of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, but also to guarantee humanitarian aid to populations in distress. The international community must unite its efforts to ensure that all parties concerned substitute negotiation for recourse to arms and demand effective respect for religious freedom, human rights and all fundamental freedoms.

As Pope Benedict XVI recently reiterated during his trip to Lebanon, we should import ideas of peace and creativity, we should find ways of accepting each person in his otherness, we should therefore make visible before the world the respect that religions have for one another, respect for man as a creature of God, and love of neighbour as fundamental to all religions. In that way, using all possible means, including material assistance, we must help to bring an end to war and violence so that all can help rebuild the peace. On his return from Lebanon, the Holy Father called on Arab

countries, as brothers, to propose workable solutions that respect the dignity, the rights and the religion of every individual. Those who wish to build peace must cease to see in the other an evil to be eliminated. It is not easy to see in the other a person to be respected and loved, and yet that is necessary if one desires to build peace, if one desires fraternity.

Moreover, only an international community strongly rooted in values that genuinely uphold human dignity can provide viable solutions to the new types of conflict perpetrated by transnational groups, which spread a pseudo-religious hegemonic ideology contemptuous of individual rights and civil peace. We think of the instability and the recent terrorist attacks in some countries of Africa and Asia, or the collusion between drug trafficking and terrorism in other regions of the world.

Beyond even situations of conflict, today all States, rich and poor, see their stability threatened by the economic crisis to which no true and sustainable solution has been found to date. Just a few years ago international discussions were essentially about potential ways to share the resources of the rich countries, where well-being appeared to be firmly established, or about the legitimate recognition of the rights of developing countries. The debate was about finding the right balance between free trade and financial assistance; the transfer of know-how, technologies and direct aid to the poorest populations; the clash of ideas about the foreign debt of the poorest countries; the role of the World Trade Organization and its connections to the United Nations; the reform of multilateral financial institutions; and comprehensive access to essential drugs.

That unavoidable debate must be continued, even if today it is overshadowed and made more complex by the issues related to financial stability, whose impact is global. In fact, we can all see that the financial stability of the most developed societies has been seriously endangered, especially because of shortsighted economic policies often based only on maximizing short-term profits.

The threat of collapse of financial systems in economies that were until now the most prosperous has serious consequences for social cohesion. It has led to the resurgence of old fantasies such as exacerbated nationalism, populism and xenophobia. Add to that the tragedy of millions of people weighed down by hunger, the lack of basic health care and abject poverty, as well as of vast populations living in inhuman conditions, displaced populations and refugees, among whom are thousands of children.

Given the difficulty of finding common solutions that respect the principles of self-determination, independence, and the equality of States and the right of peoples, the anthropological crisis of which I spoke has emerged, that is, a lack of conviction in the supreme dignity of every individual, even when they have just been conceived or are in a vegetative or terminal state.

It is an illusion to want to create true harmony among peoples, to guarantee peaceful coexistence and real cooperation between States if we confine ourselves to a vision of mankind that — without in theory denying the importance of the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual — consigns the profound dimension of the person and his uniqueness to the rank of secondary factors, and insists on vague collective concepts that reduce the individual to the simple category of consumer or agent of production in the market. A human being is not a mere number in the masses of the global population. And the masses of the global population cannot be viewed coldly or with suspicion as a danger threatening the environmental and social balances. We are talking about men and women, each with dignity and rights. Ideological visions that do not take that into account lead irreparably to social disintegration and conflict.

In that sense, we must reject attempts to view the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda, as well as the interpretation of human rights treaties, on the basis of a limited and relativist vision of humankind that, cleverly using ambiguous expressions, threatens the right to life and presents a deconstruction of the family model based on the union of a man and a woman and oriented towards procreation and the education of children. In the end, those attempts risk the irremediable weakening of the credibility and legitimacy of the Organization as a universal tool for sustainable cooperation and peace.

It is of the first importance to provide an effective solution to the open debate on the reform and improvement of the functioning of United Nations organs in order to revitalize its ability to anticipate conflicts and resolve them peacefully. However, that will be possible only with a constantly renewed effort to return to the founding vision of the Organization.

Sustainable peace will not be possible without each and every one of us engaging in a constructive dialogue directed toward achieving dignified and decent living conditions for all human beings.

That can be done only through a shared belief with regard to fundamental values that guarantee respect for human life. In that regard, respect for religious freedom is essential, within national public life as well as internationally. Reason tells us that each person has transcendental dignity, which brings with it freedom to determine one's own ultimate destiny and which national and international authorities, as well as social mechanisms, must fully respect. That is why actions by Governments and international organizations must necessarily strive to promote comprehensive human development, creating legal, economic and social conditions that genuinely reflect the importance of human dignity and its transcendental dimension, both at the personal level and collectively.

Religion should not be thought of other than as a factor of peace and progress, a living force for the well-being of all. Indeed, it leads human beings to overcome every egotistical interest and to devote their energies to the service of others, including for peace among peoples. That is why all forms of fanaticism and exclusivism and all acts of violence towards one's neighbour are an exploitation of and a deviation from religion. Moreover, history has shown that a biased concept of secularism, or tolerance that would limit religious matters to the private sphere, can only undermine the bases for peaceful coexistence, at both the national and international levels.

The Holy See has been involved in international cooperation activities since they were first given institutional structure. We established our Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York in 1964. The reason for its presence as a subject of international law in this intergovernmental institution is first of all its desire to offer to the international community a transcendent view of life and social relations, recalling in particular the dignity of the individual and his fundamental rights, in the first place the right to religious freedom. The international community has always welcomed this contribution, which allows common initiatives to put back into a profound perspective, in which the underlying unity of the human family and the call to the generosity of individuals and peoples must always be reaffirmed.

The President took the Chair.

It is in that spirit that the Holy See wishes to offer its contribution to the present session of the General Assembly, aligning itself with the wish you expressed in your inaugural address, Mr. President, that all Member States, which share the responsibility to implement the principles and objectives of the Organization, would renew their commitment to resolve disputes by peaceful dialogue and not by resorting to confrontation. Only in that way will the aspirations and hopes of all be achieved. Only in that way can the United Nations play its indispensable role in peace and development.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pak Kil Yon, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Pak Kil Yon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I expect your proficient stewardship will guide the Assembly to success.

At the outset, I would like to express our profound gratitude to the heads of State and Government and peoples of the States Members of the United Nations, the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, representatives of United Nations bodies and of many countries for deep condolences they extended to us at the demise in December last year of the great leader of our people, Kim Jong Il. General Kim Jong Il devoted tireless efforts until the last moment of his life to firmly safeguarding the dignity and sovereignty of our country and the prosperity and happiness of its people, as well as to accomplishing the cause of global independence and world peace and stability.

Today, having hailed dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un as the Supreme Leader of the Party, State and Army, our people are striving to build a prosperous and powerful socialist State. Dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un safeguards the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula by carrying forward the Songun policy of General Kim Jong Il in good faith. He wisely leads the general advance march for developing our economy, improving people's livelihood, and devising a development strategy of our own style and innovative methods with his insight into the world.

Our dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un is firmly determined to make our people, who have overcome manifold hardships, enjoy a happy life to their heart's content in a prosperous socialist State. Dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un is implementing independent foreign policy and opening up a new chapter in the development of relations with other countries that are friendly to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, not bound by the past. Our people are following dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un with absolute trust in him and are vigorously advancing to the final victory with full conviction in and optimism about the future, single-heartedly united behind him.

The founding of the United Nations in the last century gave hope to mankind following a tragic world war — hope of achieving common prosperity by ensuring peace and security and developing cooperation among States based on the principle of sovereign equality. Yet today, after the first decade of the new century, that desire of the mankind has yet to be achieved. At present in international relations, high-handedness and arbitrariness are becoming ever more undisguised, and the use of force and acts of State terrorism aimed at infringing on sovereignty, interference in internal affairs and effecting regime change are being perpetrated under such pretexts as non-proliferation and humanitarian intervention.

We are now witnessing the resurrection of the outdated international relations of the first half of the twentieth century, when a handful of great Powers dominated the world by resorting to the use of force. This resurrection tarnishes the credibility of the United Nations, whose mandate is to ensure global peace and security.

The fact that the theme "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" was chosen for the current session shows the seriousness of the current international situation. The most serious issue in the international arena at present is a flagrant violation of the principles of respect for sovereignty and equality. Unless the high-handedness and arbitrariness of certain countries are thoroughly eliminated, it will be hard to say that the United Nations is fulfilling its role and function as a centre for coordinating cooperative relations between States based on the principle of sovereign equality as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The unjustifiable interference, pressure and use of force that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and the right to self-determination and existence of Palestine should be rejected.

Democratizing the United Nations and, in particular, strengthening the authority of the General Assembly are urgent issues for enhancing the central role of the United Nations in international relations.

The Assembly resolution adopted long ago on dismantling the so-called United Nations Command stationed in South Korea and the resolution adopted annually on ending the United States blockade against Cuba remain unimplemented. These are typical examples that show the need to strengthen the authority of the General Assembly.

It is quite natural for the General Assembly, which represents the general will of all Member States, to supervise the overall activities of the Organization. In particular, it should be given the authority to undertake final review of Security Council resolutions related to peace and security, such as sanctions and use of force. The abuse of the Security Council as a tool for pursuing strategic interests by a handful of countries should never be overlooked. Last April, the United States took issue with our legitimate and peaceful space launch, which followed universal international law, and forced the Council to adopt an unjust statement. That alone shows how the Council has been abused.

Security Council reform, which is at the core of overall United Nations reform, is a matter that should no longer be delayed. It should be carried out in a manner that guarantees responsibility, transparency, impartiality and objectivity in its activities and ensures full representation of developing countries in its composition.

Other United Nations bodies in which double standards and the theory of force are extremely evident are the Third Committee of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Politicization, selectivity and double standards in deliberations on human rights should be put to an end. We should never allow the continuation of the practice whereby human rights situations of selected countries are either called into question or simply ignored in accordance with the political purposes and interests of the West and the Western standard values.

In the field of sustainable development, which is now one of the three targets set by the United Nations, the agreement reached in the United Nations

Conference on Sustainable Development, held last June in Rio de Janeiro, should be implemented. Practical measures should be taken to solve such issues as establishing fair international economic and trade relations, fulfilling official development assistance commitments, transferring environmentally clean technologies to developing countries and strengthening financial support.

Today, due to the ongoing hostile policy of the United States towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a vicious cycle of confrontation and aggravation of tension continues to afflict the Korean peninsula, which has become the world's most dangerous hotspot, a place where a spark could set off a thermonuclear war. At the root of that hostile policy, which has lasted for more than half a century, towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea lies the intention of the United States to destroy the ideas and system our people have chosen and to occupy the entire Korean peninsula, in order to use it as a stepping stone in realizing its strategy of dominating all of Asia.

Since the day the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was founded, the United States has designated it an enemy and refused to recognize its sovereignty. Since then, it has pursued every kind of sanction, pressure and military provocation against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for more than half a century. Its hostile policy is most deeply rooted in the military field. No precedent can be found in modern history for the situation whereby the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States have continued as warring parties after hostilities ended and for more than 60 years altogether.

With a view to eliminating the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by force, the United States has already finalized various war scenarios, and is waiting for a chance to implement them, as it has outlined in a contingency plan to impose military rule after a military invasion. In accordance with those plans for military operations, the United States has staged various joint military exercises under different names in and around the Korean peninsula for several decades. A typical example was a combined military exercise named Ulji Freedom Guardian, staged at the end of last August and involving huge numbers of armed forces, which pushed the situation on the Korean peninsula to the brink of war.

It is only the patience and military deterrent self-defence capacity of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that have prevented the continued military provocations of the United States from turning into all-out war on the Korean peninsula. However, this does not mean that the patience of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is inexhaustible. Our people value peace and stability in pursuing their overall goal of building a prosperous and powerful State. But the dignity of our nation and the sovereignty of our country are even more valuable.

Our principled stand is based on reacting to an aggressor's reckless provocations with an immediate, corresponding strike in defence of our nation's dignity and sovereignty, and to respond to a war of aggression with a just war of reunification of the country. The realities of the situation on the Korean peninsula prove that we have been absolutely right to have built a military deterrent capacity for our self-defence, by tightening our belts in order to pursue the path of Songun and independence. Our military deterrent is a mighty weapon that defends the country's sovereignty and a powerful means of preventing war on the Korean peninsula, as well as a strong guarantee that enables us to focus our efforts on economic construction and improving people's livelihoods.

The only way to prevent war and ensure lasting peace on the Korean peninsula is to put an end to the hostile policy of the United States towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. That policy is the root cause that has made the Korean peninsula the world's most dangerous hotspot, and it is the chief obstacle to lasting peace and security. The nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula is also a product of that policy. None of these problems, including the Korean peninsula nuclear issue, can be resolved without first ending the hostile policy of the United States, which views the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as an enemy target and tries to stifle it at any cost. That is the essence of the process of our dialogue with the United States and a lesson we have drawn from practical experience.

Since the turn of the new century, North-South summit meetings have been held twice, amid the joyful enthusiasm of all our fellow countrymen. They resulted in the adoption of the 15 June North-South Joint Declaration and the 4 October Declaration, and created an atmosphere in which the desire for reconciliation, cooperation and reunification between North and South reached a peak. Soon after taking office, however, the new South Korean authorities annulled all inter-Korean

agreements, including the 15 June North-South Joint Declaration and the 4 October Declaration, which had been warmly welcomed and were fully supported by the entire Korean nation and the international community, including the United Nations. Furthermore, the confrontation between fellow countrymen and systems have caused an extreme deterioration in inter-Korean relations. The South Korean authorities rubbed salt in the wounds of our people, who had suffered such a huge national loss, even insulting our supreme dignity with acts of political terrorism, and leaving inter-Korean relations totally bankrupt. History will bring them to justice.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will join hands with anyone who truly desires the country's reunification and national reconciliation and prosperity. With responsibility and patience, and relying on the nation's concerted efforts, it is making every effort to realize the historic cause of national reunification by preventing interference by outside forces and any attempt by anti-reunification forces to achieve permanent national division.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to further strengthen and develop the relations of friendship and cooperation with all countries that respect its sovereignty, pursuant to the principles of independence, peace and friendship on which its foreign policy is based, and will actively cooperate with the efforts of United Nations Member States to secure world peace and stability and to achieve sustainable development.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Marco Albuja, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and Political Integration of Ecuador.

Mr. Albuja (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like to extend to you the congratulations of the Government of Ecuador on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, for which we will provide whatever support you need to help achieve the international agenda's commitments, especially those that have to do with revitalization of the Assembly.

We are participating in this important forum with the clear purpose of sharing our ideas and proposals for the international system that governs us. We are well aware that the United Nations system was conceived in the middle of the last century and that its structure is based on, among other things, the principles of humanism, multilateralism and the equality of States before the law. Since then, the great majority of countries have fought to see those principles complied with, but there have also been countries whose power has wrongfully enabled them to fail to live up to the principles and to their obligations within the system.

The world has changed substantially since the road map for the United Nations was designed, and its functions must adapt to the new demands of international relations, characterized by exchanges of information and communications and by interdependent economies. We believe the time has come to end the illegitimate political exploitation of United Nations bodies by certain Powers, which continue to exert political and economic pressure and even to intervene militarily in sovereign States whose Governments criticize the international status quo or focus on different ideologies from those promoted by some Powers, or whose public policies are opposed to the economic interests of large transnational companies. Such pressure delegitimizes the system and distorts multilateralism itself.

In the five years of President Rafael Correa's Government, Ecuador has regained sovereignty in decision-making on its internal and international policies, pursuing decisions that promote a horizontal relationship between countries with the same rights and obligations. In those five years Ecuador has supported peace. That is why we have expressed our concern about the terrible consequences for human beings that result from military interventions conducted by the Powers, and why we are calling loudly for dialogue and for respect for human rights and the people's self-determination in all countries in conflict. We have had enough of geopolitical visions that are imposed by force, destroying human rights. In that regard, Ecuador welcomes with great hope and enthusiasm the dialogue process in the sister Republic of Colombia, which is the bravest step that the Government of that fraternal country could have taken.

Today the world is experiencing constant changes in the distribution of power. New regional Powers have emerged in the past 20 years and have begun to play a decisive role in international politics and security. Russia, China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Argentina, Indonesia, Venezuela and the developing world, in general, are now the drivers of the global economy. It is therefore a political imperative that multilateralism be strengthened and promoted with regard to respect and equality among States.

It is important to point out that Latin American countries committed to multilateralism, in response to unilateral actions that undermine international stability, have established regional institutions, such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America — Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Such bodies are restoring the principle of universal representation in global governance and endowing it with new characteristics so as to adjust it to today's political and social reality. However, while such countries and organizations seek to keep the institution of inter-State work alive, the continuing unilateral actions of certain Powers without consultation jeopardize the ability of multilateral bodies to provide legitimate and valid responses to international needs and problems.

In that context, Ecuador believes that the weakening of the decision-making system in the United Nations undermines international law. Open dialogue is therefore needed in order to effectively reform our Organization. We believe that it is time to begin a structural reform of the United Nations that makes it more democratic and up to date and that prevents the political and illegal use of its bodies. The system will be truly democratic, as it claims to be, when everyone accepts that each country has a vote and that the majority decides in a democratic, free and sovereign way, without a small group of States that represents 2.5 per cent of the Organization's membership being able to veto the remaining 97.5 per cent.

We must of course restore the fundamental principles of the United Nations, namely, the legal equality of States, international social justice, unconditional respect for international law, the protection and defence of all human rights, cooperation and the promotion of the mutual interests of nations, respect for the sovereignty of States, the free self-determination of peoples, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States, the elimination of wars of aggression and the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue, without recourse to the threat or, worse still, the use of force. But, above all, we must restore the principle of collective action. As a result, we must give it values, such as democracy, universality and supranationality.

In order to be effective and efficient in its work to maintain international peace and stability, the new multilateralism should not uphold the veto power or the existence of an exclusive club, whose members are a small group of countries that decide the system's future and other measures that affect the remaining countries. The new system would require all countries, as equals, to be equally represented in decision-making that affected the international system. It should not allow non-compliance with international standards by some States, but must rather demand strict adherence to international law and full respect for international judicial authority as the only way of promoting peaceful coexistence among nations.

Ecuador supports the comprehensive reform of the United Nations system and the democratization of the international decision-making bodies. We advocate a comprehensive reform of the Security Council that includes decisions on membership categories, the veto issue, regional representation, the size of an expanded Security Council and its working methods, and its relationship with the General Assembly — in other words, a comprehensive change in its composition and operation. The idea is to make the Council representative, democratic and effective to enable the international community to have an appropriate collective security system. We believe that we must work on that proposal, study it, discuss it and decide on it together.

Our country also calls for a comprehensive revitalization of the General Assembly. We propose that its role as the main depositary of global sovereignty be fully recognized within the United Nations system since it is only there that all members are represented. The General Assembly should therefore have the ability to discuss and take binding decisions on all significant issues on the international agenda, including international peace and security.

An example of the imbalance and lack of democracy of the current United Nations system that clearly reflects the urgent need for its reform is the situation in which the abhorrent blockade on the sisterly Republic of Cuba continues because an economic and military Power is able to impose its will and political view despite the contrary decision of 186 countries. Then again, the United States cannot continue to include Cuba on its spurious list of countries that sponsor terrorism simply because of an ideological unwillingness to accept that the island has survived its forced isolation. Arbitrariness has played a great part in that issue.

Cuba has declared that its territory has never been used nor ever will be used to organize, finance or carry out terrorist acts against any country, including

the United States. Similarly, the prominent former United States President, Jimmy Carter, has stated that the role of Havana as a guarantor in the peace talks between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the Colombian Government refutes any argument about the need for Cuba to remain on that list. The former President, whom we consider a friend of the Latin American cause, said that a more sincere dialogue could take place between the two countries if the United States were to remove Cuba from its list of State sponsors of terrorism. We share and support that view.

Consistent with Ecuador's recognition of the Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, my country supports the inclusion of Palestine as a full Member of the Organization. Likewise, Ecuador reiterates its support for the historic rights of the Argentine Republic over the Malvinas Islands. The specific and anachronistic situation of those Islands should pave the way for renewed direct negotiations with the United Kingdom, as called for by Argentina. That appeal has been reiterated in several resolutions of the relevant United Nations bodies.

For Ecuador, it is essential that disputes, including those related to borders, be resolved peacefully. Ecuador has successfully achieved that.

Ecuador has also worked to strengthen the fundamental institutions of international law, such as the inviolability of diplomatic missions, as provided for in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. I wish to recall that, a few weeks ago, the Government of Ecuador had an unexpected diplomatic dispute with the Government of the United Kingdom on exactly that issue. In response, Ecuador advocated that various multilateral forums adopt resolutions affirming that principle of international law. We must say with deep gratitude that Ecuador received the resolute support of the Governments of States members of UNASUR, ALBA and the Organization of American States and of other Governments, such as that of Russia, condemning any attempt at forced entry into or violation of diplomatic premises.

The Government of Ecuador accordingly condemned the terrible events of 11 September, when the United States diplomatic mission and consulate in Cairo and Benghazi were attacked by armed groups with a tragic loss of life, including that of the United States Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens. Ecuador stands in solidarity with the people of the United States and reaffirms its condemnation of those violent acts against United States personnel in Libya and Egypt. Once again, we declare our respect for the inviolability of the premises of diplomatic missions.

My country believes that it is essential for international organizations to support and promote the observance and development of all human rights. That should be their ultimate objective, not just a politically correct way to make a discussion attractive or to justify implementing a geopolitical outlook on different cultural realities. Human rights are a principle that is lived every day and that is constantly developed and upheld. It is a principle including all of humankind with no exception, no discrimination, no categories and no prioritization. The principle admits no reservations or double standards. It is either completely defended and we submit to it, or it is rejected. But conditioned, partial compliance is not admissible. We are, of course, speaking of the progressive development of international and national instruments governing human rights and the legal international bodies that ensure compliance with those instruments.

To write on paper that all men and women around the world are equal without applying it in practice is nothing but hypocrisy. Human rights, as a whole, can be summarized in the right to life. The question is: how many thousands of human beings must continue to be sacrificed in the name of the abstract principle without understanding, without really feeling what the concept is. When will humanity ask, for example, if the defence of democracy in its Western version or the accumulation of transnational capital and the expansion of organized crime constitute sufficient justification for the sacrifice of tens of thousands of human lives or for the destruction of the planet.

In order to guarantee the rights of human beings, deepen their social and economic development, and achieve the harmony of nature while being fully responsible towards all generations, Ecuador has changed some traditional policies since the adoption of the new Ecuadorian Constitution in 2008. We understand that we must overcome the archaic concept that the rule of law consists of laws carved in stone that were approved at some time in history but are obsolete and out of date today. The law cannot be abstract, because in essence it is a living thing needed to give security to human beings, and it cannot be

divorced from reality. That is why we also advocate that the standards that are part of international legal coexistence should be discussed and updated, because their forced application leads to chaos and weakens the rule of international law.

From that point of view, our Constitution calls on us to live in a constitutional State of rights and guarantees. The fundamental objective is what is called in the Quechua language *sumak kawsay*, or "the right to a good life" of people and nature, knowing how to live fully, without any discrimination. It is based on dignity, solidarity, equality and the complementarity of people, cultures, nationalities, people's social groups and countries in general.

It is the commitment to being human that calls on us to encourage tolerance, respect and full support for everybody, especially those afflicted with disabilities. Ecuador has been nationally recognized on that front, because, in the last five years, it has maintained the highest ratings for effectiveness in programme support and reintegration into daily life of our brothers and sisters with disabilities. The strength of our Vice-President Lenin Moreno Garcés in his battle against discrimination against people with disabilities has made it possible for him to be globally recognized. Admiration of his programmes has led to his being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Since human beings are at the centre of the covenant of the popular revolution, we have given full support to those who suffer persecution because of their political ideas and sexual preferences. My country has the largest number of refugees in Latin America and one of the largest numbers in the entire Western hemisphere. Almost 60,000 people living in Ecuador are refugees. We also have around 500,000 economic migrants. That has led to recognition and expressions of gratitude by United Nations bodies. Because people in the situation of being refugees and asylum-seekers have been incorporated into Ecuadorian society, they receive political and social protection as well as an economic subsidy from the Ecuadorian State.

Social groups that traditionally were discriminated against in Ecuador for ethnic or cultural reasons have also seen a substantial improvement in their situation. That is shown by the indicators for education, health and housing. But above all, President Rafael Correa has stressed that action to benefit the poorest is the main objective of State policy. The incorporation of social groups into the active life of the country has taken place, with full respect for their ancestral culture and their traditions, customs, beliefs and political views.

We are also one of the countries that has strengthened gender equality, the development of the rights of women, and the application of affirmative action measures that cut across public policies in all the functions of our Government. However, those successful changes have led to a reaction from sectors of traditional power, both inside and outside Ecuador. Just yesterday, we noted the second anniversary of an attempted coup d'état and assassination. But things have changed. The empowerment of citizens fully identified with the Government has made it possible to overcome this year's crisis as well as an international media campaign of criticism and misinformation on the activities and achievements of our country.

I would like to highlight from this rostrum that Ecuador is the first country in the world to have recognized the rights of nature in its Constitution. Nature stops being a passive object and becomes an active subject. In that connection, the Constitution of Ecuador states that Mother Earth, or *Pachamama*, where life reproduces and flourishes, has a right to full respect for its existence and the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure, functions and developmental processes. By recognizing those rights, we close the circle of the complementary relationship with the rights of human beings. The Constitution of Ecuador has led to major progress in legal and environmental areas. It overcomes the human-centred vision of law prevailing in the world. We aspire to open a discussion in this forum aimed at preparing a universal declaration on the rights of nature.

In the environment, Ecuador is one of the leading promoters at the international level of environmental sustainability policies. We have developed new initiatives in the fight against climate change, such as the "net avoided emissions" mechanism. That has made the Yasuní-ITT initiative an innovative sovereign decision. We have also planned to protect natural resources and the cultures of several ethnic groups in the Amazon region and have accepted the responsibility to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

In that context, Ecuador has been a leader in the regional debate on a model for domestic sustainable development. At the same time, together with the regional Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas bloc, we have played a critical role within the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change, and we have noted the scant political will, especially in the countries in the North, to let themselves be subject to legally binding commitments to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Ecuador has proposed, on the international level, an alternative sustainable participatory development model.

When it comes to promoting human rights and the freedom of expression, the Government of Ecuador has been faithful to its tradition, which is to protect those who seek refuge in its territory or its diplomatic missions because they are victims of political persecution, and has granted diplomatic asylum to the Australian citizen Julian Assange in response to his request to the President of the Republic of Ecuador and after an exhaustive judicial assessment. That has been a unique opportunity for the world community to debate the process of asylum in that context and to observe the political, legal and human repercussions of its application within the framework of the strict respect for international law. Ecuador is proud of having taken a sovereign decision in a legal procedure that protects human beings anywhere in the world.

Our country promotes the reform of the multilateral United Nations system through example and not just in words. We have also undertaken an unprecedented institutional reform of our own. The results have been highly satisfactory, with outstanding levels of growth and poverty reduction. I want to mention just a few figures, so that members can have a clear idea of our achievements. Under the Government of the Citizens' Revolution, the poverty rate has been reduced from 36.7 per cent to 25.3 per cent, a reduction of more than 11 per cent. Extreme poverty, that is, abject poverty, has come down from 16.5 per cent to 9.4 per cent. We have reduced the Gini coefficient from 0.55 per cent to 0.47 per cent. For the first time in our two centuries as a republic, the extreme poverty rate for Ecuador's population is below 10 per cent. An annual education budget of $858 million has now grown by a factor of 5.1, to $4.366 billion. Payment of external debt is not more than 4.2 per cent of gross domestic product, while our spending on public social services stands at 11 per cent of gross domestic product.

Every international agency that has reviewed our macroeconomic numbers and social spending agree that the changes in our country are drastically improving the lives of our citizens. We have not settled for mere words, but, rather, our country's success story is written in concrete, practical actions as part of a national development plan, overseen and managed by the President of the Republic himself, that is bringing rapid change to our country — and without the usual social ills that result from the prescriptions of the international financial institutions. On the contrary, ours is a participatory model founded in solidarity.

We have not neglected foreign direct investment, which we believe essential to our development strategy, so long as it complements our national initiatives, including our national development plan. I state with pride that the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador is the first in the world to define legal security as a human right in itself, respect for which and the direct application of which are guaranteed by judicial, administrative and constitutional authorities.

Nevertheless, we believe that progress for Ecuador or for any other country is at risk if the international system, either because of general indifference or because of interests that run contrary to global well-being, feeds a new era of anarchy in which unilateral actions or geopolitical conflicts predominate. For that reason, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the need to rehabilitate and revitalize multilateralism, to upgrade international mechanisms and strengthen international law, so as to safeguard international peace and security and a healthy environment, which are the necessary ingredients for worldwide development and prosperity. We want to use this platform to urge the international community and the representatives of all the countries of the world to join in demonstrating the resolve, bravery and political will to drive the creation of a new international order — new in being more just, more open, more participatory and more democratic.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pham Quang Vinh, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Quang Vinh (Viet Nam): On behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I extend my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I am confident that under your stewardship this session will be crowned with success. I appreciate the excellent work done by the Secretary-General and welcome the outcomes of the sixty-sixth session, presided over by Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser.

To start with, we would like to welcome the theme proposed for this year's general debate, "Bringing

about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". This theme is of particular relevance in today's world, when instability and conflicts continue in various regions, especially in North Africa and the Middle East. The decades-long Palestinian-Israeli conflict lingers on and requires a satisfactory solution, including the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian State coexisting peacefully with the State of Israel. Progress has yet to be made in disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, while the risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continues to grow. New, complicated developments are emerging in the Asia-Pacific region, a dynamically growing and important region of the world.

We believe that the success of this General Assembly session will significantly contribute to the primary goal of the United Nations, maintaining world peace and security. Accordingly, we must further uphold international law and strengthen compliance with it. Nations must strongly commit to the fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-use of force, as well as respect for the national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. We must promote dialogue and the use of peaceful means in the settlement of disputes, especially recourse to international and regional organizations and international legal mechanisms. And we must not accept the imposition of sanctions like those against Cuba, the removal of which the Assembly has repeatedly called for.

International law is an intellectual creation of the civilized world, which all States must respect and abide by in good faith. If international law is enforced, the risk of conflict will be minimized and sustained peace will be better secured.

Viet Nam therefore welcomes the important outcome of the recent High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels (resolution 67/1), which reaffirmed that the rule of law is fundamental to political dialogue and cooperation among States and is the indispensable bedrock for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. Compliance with international law is an essential principle that guides the policies and actions of each nation, as well as the joint endeavours of the international community.

When we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) later this year, we should further reaffirm our strong commitment to and compliance with that constitution of the seas, which contributes to the maintenance of peace, stability and maritime security, safety and cooperation.

The United Nations continues to play an indispensable role, entrusted to it by the international community, in the maintenance of international peace and security. Viet Nam commends the work done by the United Nations, especially in helping settle regional disputes and conflicts by peaceful means, including through the strengthened use of peacekeeping operations. We expect the Organization will continue to build further upon its experience in that area and promote a culture of peace and dialogue, to better resolve ongoing conflicts and prevent the eruption of new ones.

The United Nations must step up efforts in disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, while strengthening international cooperation and ensuring the right of States to use related technologies for peaceful purposes. Multilateral negotiating forums in this area, particularly the Conference on Disarmament, must be revitalized and intensified.

Furthermore, we should recognize the increasingly important role of regional organizations. In East Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) continues to play a central role in the regional architecture and helps promote peace, stability and security in the region, including maritime security in the South China Sea. Viet Nam fully supports ASEAN's six-point principles statement on the South China Sea, which further reaffirms the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, respect for international law, particularly UNCLOS, the full implementation of the Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and a timely agreement on a code of conduct.

Peace is the prerequisite for development. Yet it is sustainable development, including the end of poverty, the promotion of social justice and the elimination of inequality in international relations, which helps resolve the root causes of conflicts and lays the foundation for a sustained peace.

Today, the global economy continues to be in difficulty. The Doha Development Round has yet to make progress, while protectionism persists and the shortcomings of the international economic and financial

systems have yet to be overcome. As a result, many countries, especially developing countries, continue to face great difficulties in their development, including in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In that context, it is essential that we reaffirm our strong political commitment to ensuring the realization of the MDGs, the promotion of inclusive sustainable and green development, and the effective response to natural disasters, climate change and other global challenges.

The United Nations needs to strengthen global partnerships for development and take the lead in an inclusive process to formulate the post-2015 global development agenda, including the proposed sustainable development goals. In that regard, we urge developed countries to fulfil their pledges for increased development assistance and support developing countries in capacity-building.

This year, Viet Nam commemorates the thirty-fifth anniversary of its membership in the United Nations. Throughout that time, Viet Nam has consistently been an active and responsible member of the Organization, striving for peace, national independence, democracy, social progress and prosperity for all nations. Building on its 25 years of reform and important accomplishments, Viet Nam has been working towards a growth model that links economic development with social progress and environmental protection.

In the face of recent global economic difficulties, Viet Nam has taken steps to effectively maintain macroeconomic stability and ensure social security. Viet Nam continues to strengthen the rule of law and build a State of the people, by the people and for the people, which places the people at the centre and promotes their ownership and rights in all spheres.

Pursuing the policy of proactive international integration, Viet Nam continues to contribute actively to the work of the United Nations, ASEAN, the Non-Aligned Movement, the International Organization of la Francophonie and others. We also contribute constructively in multilateral forums in endeavours designed to respond to global challenges including nuclear security; disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; sustainable development; climate change; water, food and energy security; and the achievement of the MDGs.

Viet Nam has been implementing with good results the United Nations initiative of Delivering as One. To further contribute to the work of the United Nations, Viet Nam has put forth its candidature for membership in the Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016, and we look forward to the Assembly's support.

Viet Nam always endorses efforts to enhance the role and effectiveness of the United Nations to enable the Organization to become the true centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of the common goals enshrined in its Charter. We therefore support the continued reform of the United Nations, including the strengthening of the General Assembly as the most representative deliberative body, and of the Economic and Social Council in the field of socioeconomic development, as well as the expansion of Security Council membership and reform of its working methods.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.